



"NEVER QUARREL

with a woman." We almost forget this saying when we hear of a housekeeper who hasn't sense enough to use.

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A complete wreck of domestic happiness has often resulted from badly washed dishes, from an unclean kitchen, or from trifles which seemed light as air. But by these things a man often judges of his wife's devotion to her family, and charges her with general neglect when he finds her careless in these particulars. Many a home owes a large part of its thrifty neatness and its consequent happiness to SAPOLIO. No. 23.

A MORAL SINNER

BY MYRTILLA N. DALY

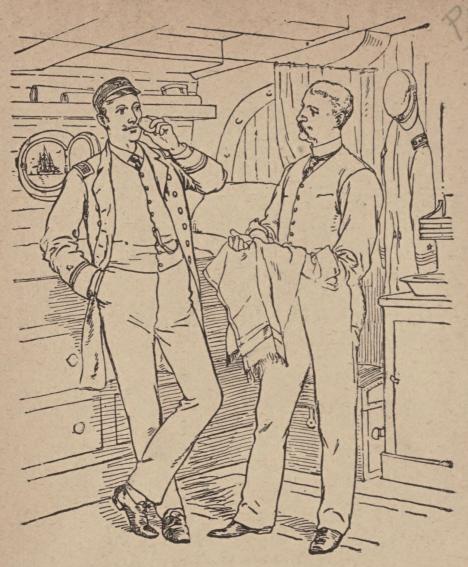


That we have power within ourselves to do And suffer; what, we know not till we try; But something nobler than to live and die, So taught the kings of old philosophy."

-SHELLEY.

Janeus Barreus

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CONTENTS.

	CHAPTEI	RI.			
AT A BREAKFAST	TABLE, .				7
	CHAPTER	II.			
PROPINQUITY, .			•		18
	CHAPTER	III.			
AT THE FETE,					24
	CHAPTER	IV.			
CLARENCE THORN	BERRY,		•		31
	CHAPTER	v.			
A STRANGE PROCE	EEDING, .				42
	CHAPTER	VI.			
THE COTILLON,					57
	CHAPTER	VII.			
THE MORNING AF	TER,				66
	CHAPTER	VIII.			
AN INTERLUDE,					79
	CHAPTER	IX.			
A VISIT TO THE	Monastery,				83
	CHAPTER	X.			
RETROSPECTION,					91

	CHAPTER	XI.			
PRECIPITATION,					100
	CHAPTER	XII.			
CINTRA,					101
	CHAPTER	XIII.			
THE LESSON LEA	RNED, .				112
	CHAPTER	XIV.			
A HALF HOUR I	N A STUDIO,				121
	CHAPTER	XV.			
REPARATION,					127
	CHAPTER	XVI.			
"THE IRONY OF	FATE,"				137
	CHAPTER				
THE COUNTESS I	ELZEVIR, .				142
	CHAPTER	XVIII.			
"BID TIME RET	URN, .				148
	CHAPTER	XIX.			
PARAGRAPHS,					159
	CHAPTER				
THE CRUISE OF	THE HERON,		•	0	169
CODA					182

A MORAL SINNER.

CHAPTER I.

AT A BREAKFAST TABLE.

THE degeneracy of the age is the sole excuse for the novels or novelists of to day. Were we not so depraved as to prefer "new" to "good", "bad" to "old", the majority would not exist. That dear old trio, Charles, William, and Walter, need not fear: they will not be rivaled in literary merit: they may for a time be crowded off the table, but they will always hold their own on the book-shelves.

But as long as there is a cry for something "just out" there will be an excuse to write; and with this excuse, I begin my story.

A breakfast table! Would it be possible to attack people at a more uninteresting moment? But breakfast is essential to one's comfort, however exalted, so it should not be despised on paper any more than in real life.

Besides, this was not an ordinary breakfast, for at the table were seated five or six charming young women and as many equally interesting men; and a pleasant, rosy-tinted, gray-haired dame gave a proper dignity to the scene.

It was a delightful room too; the out-come of the nineteenth century's high art.

We care for nothing startling in the early day, it should dawn on us gradually without a shock. To drink coffee in the morning in a brilliantly colored room, is like trying to watch the transit of a heavenly body across the sun's disk without a bit of smoked glass: we blink and wink, and consider the enjoyment of the whole performance as very questionable.

But the coloring here was neither gay nor frivolous. The walls were hung in brown plush, that soft, beautiful, caressing shade, that time has put on many an old canvas in the Louvre or the Luxumbourg; a deep Venetian border of gold gave it a subdued richness, that one felt rather than saw. If a breakfast table is well set, well served, the rest of the household may be safely judged perfection. Oh the agony of a table-cloth vacillating to the east or west, when it should point due north! And some think at this unimportant meal a medley of nondescript dishes admissible! But not so here; the cloth was of the finest damasked holland, of a rich orange and brown; and every article thereon of amber color. No incongruity of tints; no plebeian crockery, no ordinary table paraphernalia found its way hither: even the knives and forks had amber handles. The curtains were drawn aside, and in at the long open windows old Mother Nature wished the tardy fast breakers a much pleasanter "good-morning" than they deserved. and there among the folds of the hangings an exquisite aquarelle peeped out, and charming bits of statuary brought reflected lights into the dark corners.

Very few of us are apt to be in an amiable frame of mind at that early and tasteless meal; but the assemblage here was a brilliant exception. Perhaps it was because

they were not in their own respective homes, the only place one can afford being as disagreeable as one may desire.

They had been talking in a desultory sort of way, trying to weave the weather into an interesting conversation, when the door opened, and another young person appeared. Had Diana in her early youth found a good English tailor, she might have had him make her a perfect fitting riding habit, which would have shown off her comely young person to the greatest advantage; then as she had entered the aerial dining hall, the same thrill of admiration would have shot through Jupiter's battered old heart, as here electrified the assembled gentlemen, as Florence Andrews entered the room. She stopped a moment at the door, with that sweet little expression of deprecation, which went straight to their hearts-the women called it posing-it might have illustrated that trite quotation of angels fearing to tread where fools rush in.

"Good-morning," she said coming toward them. "What a delicious sight! You look like a co-educational establishment." They all laughed; but they always did laugh at whatever Florence said, whether it was amusing or not—the tribute usually paid to reputed wits. "Here is the mail," she continued; "but don't agitate yourselves, there is only one manly hand among them, so they are neither bills nor billets doux. Lady Davenport, the single interesting one is for you," and she held up a large square envelope.

"It is Thornberry's crest," said one of the men, as he passed the letter over to Lady Davenport.

"Then I fear he is not coming," she exclaimed regretfully, as she hurriedly broke the seal.

If you had heard the lamentations that rose from the

breakfast table, you might have realized in part the fearful calamity her ladyship's melancholy conjecture foretold; followed by an expressive, expectant silence, while she glanced through the letter, before reading it aloud.

She sighed heavily, wiped away a mistiness round her

eyes, and began it in a sad, disheartened tone.

"Alas! fate has cruelly decreed I am not to be with you. Some malicious doctors have pronounced my lungs weak, and my poor old mother is so worried, I feel for her sake I shall have to forego the pleasure you so kindly ask me to share. A coaching party through the north of England! What could be more enticing? If I were a woman I would sit down and weep, but being a man I can only—" The good lady looked hard at the word, pretending not to make it out.

"Swear," interrupted Percy Garritson. "Confound it! it is all a man can do."

"And he is not coming?" exclaimed they. "What shall we do without him?"

- "O it is too bad, such a dreadful pity!"
- "Let us give it up!"
- "Let us postpone it, until he recovers!"
- "Let us go to him!"
- "We will miss him more than anyone else!"

These were a few of the many heart-rending ejaculations.

"And I do not feel a bit sorry, but am awfully glad he is sick, and hope he will remain so," was the crowning remark; it came from Miss Andrews, upon whom the entire table turned with indignation and amazement.

She however quietly continued her breakfast, indifferent alike to their surprise and reproaches. "You need not try so hard to convince me of my utter depravity," she answered calmly. "Your friend is ill; you regret it, I

do not. I admit my remark was cruel, unladylike perhaps; I intended to be only truthful; why do you allow your coffee to get cold, while calling me disagreeable names? What good does it do? I regard Lord Thornberry's illness as providential; he would have spoiled all my pleasure."

"Florence," said Lady Davenport, "you are talking in a very foolish and childish manner."

"Childish, dear one, did you call me?" and the girl looked very earnestly at Lady Davenport. "Why, my queen of hearts, it is not my fault if candor is out of fashion; and as for being foolish, you know I am an American, and we are apt to make a great many silly, empty speeches, you solid English people would never be guilty of."

"O blessed Americans!" Lady Davenport murmured half aloud, "their nationality serves always as the scapegoat for their folly or vulgarity." She was not in a pleasant frame of mind just now, and was thinking seriously of cutting the day short by going to bed again.

"But Clarence Thornberry is awfully nice," said one of the damsels; "he is descended from William the Conqueror."

"What a recommendation!" Florence cried. "William the Conqueror! poor old gentleman, how respectable he must have been, to have the remnants still exist after the wear and tear of seven centuries. If the Mormon forefather, like the Norman forefather, is responsible for the sins of his posterity, what a time he will have! If I were a friend of Lord Thornberry I should hunt up a worthier claim on society; but perhaps none can be found?"

"Nonsense, Clarence Thornberry is one of the best, noblest, cleverest fellows, that ever lived," exclaimed

Percy Garritson; "I don't see how you can have such a grudge against him!"

Florence not deigning a reply, Ione Travers, a hardy English girl, volunteered information on the subject. "Florence dislikes him," she began solemnly, "because he took her picture out of my album a year or two ago. She has never forgiven him, and I do not believe she ever will."

"But it is not so wicked to steal a girl's picture," remarked the man next to her, with whom the others at once agreed.

Florence looked up indignantly. "Our ideas differ. I think it very wicked, if it is my picture. I would not care a sou if he lost both his lungs, and his noble family passed entirely out of existence. I am surer than ever that he is horrid. I always despise people whom every one else is so wild over."

Again like vultures they came down upon her, with violent protests against her contempt.

"Now confess!" exclaimed a certain Captain Rogers; "have you ever seen Thornberry? Personally do you know any thing of him?"

"No, I do not," Florence admitted readily, "and for that I have given thanks the same as I gave thanks for being delivered from the cholera and yellow fever and other terrible plagues; but I suppose I am privileged to my opinion of a man who will put a girl's picture between a danseuse and a race-horse, in his smoking room."

"That is a libel!" cried Carrol Stuart, a younger son, "for he always carries your picture in his vest-pocket."

Florence almost sprang from her chair; the climax was reached; her face was full of misery and impatience. "His pocket!" she groaned. "If there is any thing more

horrible than being between a ballet dancer and racehorse, it is to be in a man's pocket—and a vest-pocket too! I never heard of a more humiliating situation." She could have cried she was so angry.

"Let us change the subject," said Lady Davenport, "or I fear Florence may die of apoplexy." Lady Davenport always recovered her good humor when some one else lost theirs.

"Did you go to Philip Arnold's wedding?" Florence asked quite naturally, turning quietly to Percy Garritson; her moods changed with wonderful rapidity; she was always the first to recover herself after a gale of this kind.

"I am sorry to say I did," Percy answered slowly.

"Why?" asked Ione Travers, a girl who always desired a word or two more to every story.

"Because so many unkind things were said about the men who were there," he added frankly.

"It was quite natural," said Captain Rogers. "Philip Arnold was a great favorite with us all."

"How logical!" sneered Ione.

"Perfectly true," answered Percy; "have you never understood why there was so much unnecessary drinking at weddings?"

"Never," they all exclaimed. "Do tell us!"

Percy looked startled; he hardly expected to excite so much sudden interest. "I will try, but it's an awful work to—to—excuse a man's weakness in the eyes of such a lot of girls," he said, lazily gathering himself together to begin. "You see, a man goes to the wedding of his best friend, perhaps, only friend; he may be going to marry the loveliest among women; she may improve his disposition, cultivate his mind, elevate his whole character, but he will never be the bon comrade of by-gone

years. You are perfectly aware of that, you are gloomy; have you not a right to be? He has been your friend since you were at college together, but now—no matter what that sweet girl, his wife, may say about being 'just the same as ever', it won't be; it is all changed. He is married; and you go and drink a great deal, not because you are thirsty or to celebrate your beloved Damon's happiness, but to sink, to forget, to drown your own selfish misery, at the loss of one more friend."

"It is all true," exclaimed the captain, "every word of it." He rose and offered Percy his cigar-case. "But, my boy, you can't make women believe it," he added in a lower tone. "No woman will ever look upon getting drunk as a token of affection."

Lady Davenport, seeing what a gloom had fallen among them, led the way to her morning garden, and they, doing as was expected of them, followed her in congenial couples.

And there they remained, until it was time to don their traveling regimentals; for in a few hours they were to start on their long expected journey, which was to be quite an ideal affair.

Lady Davenport, a lovely old lady, altogether too good for this world and its selfish inhabitants, had conceived a new way of amusing herself. She had invited a number of young people to spend a fortnight with her. No one knew what she intended doing for their pleasure, except that they were going somewhere on coaches; but they had such implicit trust in her ability for entertaining, that all went on their unknown way rejoicing.

With the exception of Florence Andrews, the little American savage, as she was called by some unpleasant people whom she had not happened to please, they were all nice, sweet, gentle girls, of eminently respectable parents. There were the two Langdon sisters, who dabbled in art; Miss How, a mild, inoffensive spinster; Lady Ione Travers, a manly young woman; manly, you understand, not mannish—there is a beautiful and subtle difference.

But why describe these people? you have met them all before. In presenting the dramatis personæ of a story, it reminds one of a pharmacy, where the jars are all labeled, Opodeldoc-Ipecacuanha-Calomel-Capsicum, etc., etc. What an insight we would have into the varied characters of our friends, if certain chemical epithets were tacked on to the end of their names! For example, that disagreeably-particular-housewife, Carbolic Acid; the wicked French governess, Aqua Toffana; the flippant young man, somebody's patented Florida Water; the old coquette, Sal Volatile; and so on, and on, until we bring in every article in the shop, from Attar of Rose for the young debutante, to Bitters for her disappointed antediluvian aunt. Does it not seem that only a few were put here to live; the remainder simply to fill up the gaps? Do you not know fifty men the world would do as well without? And perhaps an hundred women who have no share in making this earth better by their silly thoughts, and sillier deeds? But each man, of course, firmly believes he is one of the few intended to live. So Lady Ione wears coats and vests, rides after the hounds, and is perfectly confident she could have done as well, if not better, than either Jeanne d'Arc or Charlotte Corday, if she had found herself in their trying positions. The two Langdons lower art and desecrate music by decorating violins and banjos.

Miss How in her old age had taken to literary pursuits, and was proportionally stupid, whereas her sister, who was destitute of all laudable ambition, did nothing

more than dress well, which, to some minds, is far more difficult than writing poetry or painting tea cups.

But little Florence Andrews is the most charming of all. She is nothing, does nothing, never was, and never expects to be of any importance whatever; just a sweet, lovable child, whose nanïve worldliness and modern heathenism, mingled with her innate goodness, seemed a sort of open sesame to all hearts.

In her whole life she had not been at school six weeks, but she had traveled nearly the world over, acquiring a remarkable familiarity with foreign tongues, and storing away in her youthful brain wonderful bits of learning, with which she would now and then surprise her friends.

Her father was in Germany gathering matter together for his great work, "Religion Contemporary with Adam, or Skepticism among the Pre-Adamites"—a purely original theory of Professor Andrews, which had gradually formed itself in his mind during the long and tedious illness which followed the extraction of a patriotic bullet from his brain; it is true the surgeon took out with it a morsel of gray matter, but the professor was built on a large American scale; he could afford to lose much gray matter.

Unlike most Americans abroad, he was not immensely rich, neither was he very poor, but in Agur's blissful condition, which is so highly commended.

Lady Davenport had met the Andrews two years before in Venice, and finding Florence very amusing, possessing also a sort of magnetic influence upon the sterner shareholders of the universe—a power which her ladyship was, alas, rapidly losing—had offered to relieve the good old professor from the anxiety of so charming a daughter, and until Florence was properly disposed of, act the part of a mother: which of us is more generous?

Now, of course, a man devoted to literature, and the updigging of forgotten creeds, is not expected to be devoted to any thing else, even if he is a father; so the professor made Florence over to Lady Davenport, with an allowance sufficient for a young person blessed with a reasonable amount of good taste.

"Thank heaven," Lady Davenport often said, "no man will marry Florence for her money. We will escape that orthodox regiment of paupers, which usually follows an American girl round the entire continent."

These were the girls; and the men? They were all good-hearted fellows, in no way remarkable. Three were Englishmen, given to hunting, dancing and other gentlemanly pursuits; two were Scotchmen of considerable brain; one Irishman, to bring in political discussions; a German, to quarrel with the single Frenchman, who had been invited solely to quarrel with the German.

"We want," said Lady Davenport, "something more than English beef and mutton; we crave spices, truffles, cayenne pepper; men never go to sleep when they can fight over the world's politics."

That was the party; no one can be blamed for the bright effulgent star being missing.

CHAPTER II.

PROPINQUITY.

Are you dreading this merry jog through the north of England? If so, rest easy, you need not fear, you are not to be inflicted. A man who writes any thing of travel, flattering himself he can tell the world something new in this advanced day, when a school boy speaks carelessly of the long mysterious source of the Congo, or the possibility of reaching the unreachable north pole, is either a hopeless egotist, or has a grudge against humanity.

This coaching party started out with the intention of having a good time, and, strange to say, they realized their anticipations.

They traveled many miles, stopping each night at some pleasant old farm-house or half-forgotten inn, famous perhaps long ago, both in history and romance. In all pleasant particulars, this journey was intended to resemble one an hundred years before; and attending hunts and races, going to country fairs, delighting in the most innocent shows, glorying even in the little discomforts, they soon felt they were really living in the reign of a George, and such things as railroads and other disagreeable improvements did not exist.

As Lady Davenport had taken much care in planning and arranging her little tour, everything went smoothly;

she had friends in all the towns through which they passed who were delighted to entertain them, giving dinners and luncheons, and paying them other orthodoxical compliments.

But at last the fortnight was over, and the good lady, hating to lose her young friends, proposed the remainder of the month should be spent in an old French sea-town, renowned for its fine roads and facilities for yachting. And although they pretended to have any number of engagements elsewhere, they threw them over one and all, and clung like the tribes of Israel together.

It was rather late in the season, but this old French sea-town was always gay, always happy and noisy, as quite a body of troops was garrisoned there. And it was such a comfort to get to some quiet resting spot, where they could sit calmly down and smoke after dinner; where they could change their heavy walking-shoes for high-heeled slippers; where they could retire to rest without the sickening dread of being called at an unearthly hour the next morning.

Several engagements had been the result of this daily intercourse. Propinquity is a slow but almost certain triumphant power.

The stalwart Ione Travers had been persuaded by Captain Rogers, that to munch marrons glaces was quite as manly as to puff cigarettes; and that a man is much more gratified at being allowed to protect and care for the woman he admires, than to have her the most perfect of Amazons in courage and independence. And she, in her turn, corrected the captain's former ideas on many subjects; discussed with him the sagacity of Sparta; how wisely she reared her maidens, educating them the same as men; even encouraging them to wrestle in the public gymnasiums. Lady Ione, like every one else, had

her weaknesses, and "female education, or the women of Sparta" was the most cherished; for years she had been studying the topic, and now contemplated giving her ideas to the public. So if she relinquished smoking (which she knew assisted mental digestion, and kept her thin), to please Captain Rogers, he listened patiently, and finally believed that a wife should train herself to be her husband's equal in physical endurance as well as intellectual activity.

The Langdon duo had conscientiously visited every picturesque spot they even neared on their route, and sometimes delayed the journey onward an hour or two, merely to admire a dry well referred to by a poet, or an empty cavern known to history, which the others in their awful indifference were too indolent to take a few steps to behold.

The sisters had won the hearts of the Frenchman and German; and to see these deadly enemies standing rapt before a broken bit of masonry covered with dusty old ivy, mingling their sighs and exclamations of delight, was a startling proof of the softening and unlimited power of Eros.

Miss How had collected notes for her yearly attack of "Spring Garlands", and had procured such a superfluity that young Palmer was persuaded to commence a serial, "A jaunt through the Shetland Isles"; it is true they had not been to the Shetland Isles, but he had a grandfather who once lived there, and then it sounded so much more interesting—a trifling geographical license, quite admissible in the phosphorescent literature of to-day. It was to be under Miss How's supervision; experience and influence are so important in this day of many authors.

About a week after their arrival in this harbor of

valor and repose a grand military fête was to occur. During the afternoon a sort of bazar or garden party, finishing in the evening with a cotillon. Every one was in a wild state of excitement. Not that there was any reason for so being, except that the human capacity "to enjoy" is peculiarly erratic; for often what is sneered at when at home, is hailed with delight when abroad.

Before starting, Lady Davenport had warned them to be prepared for emergencies; so every man brought his galoches, and his opera-hat, and sundry articles between; as usual, the girls did likewise.

So all were ready for the coming event. Ione brought out her crimson skirts and top-coat of black velvet, in which she thought she resembled Diana Vernon; the Langdon girls wore the inevitable simple white; and Miss How again donned juvenility.

As the preparations for an occasion are always stupid, we will have nothing to do with them; sufficient it is to know, that the ball-room was a bower of uncut roses and overgrown exotics, every thing else being equally lovely and unique.

All too were in excellent spirits, as they were neither too old nor too young to appreciate a dance.

The young ladies had one and each received floral tokens of regard, and Florence, particularly, was in a rare state of beatitude, having twelve bouquets, when none of the others had gotten more than three.

"It is all owing," she told Lady Davenport confidentially, "to my being so polite to those silly military boys for three whole hours last evening."

"But what is the pleasure of having so many flowers withering in your room?" expostulated Lady Davenport. "You can hardly wear them all."

Florence looked quite serious. "Of course it is rather

sad to see them dying there on the dressing table," she admitted slowly, "but oh! it is such a satisfaction to get more roses than any other girl!" she went on hurriedly. "Now, dear Lady Davenport, I do not suppose you can understand such littleness? But when the youngest How girl told me at luncheon that she had received three large bouquets, and then asked me if I had been equally fortunate, saying it too in that mild superior English fashion that I loathe, imagine the glory I felt to be able to tell her I had received twelve. Oh, dear one, it was such a triumph, after the way she has tried to snub me! Three bouquets!" she repeated gleefully, throwing herself on a lounge and laughing merrily, innocent, however, of any malice in her amusement. "Three bouquets! and she thought I would die of envy! And one, Lady Davenport, was from her own brother. Just think how sorry he must have been for her! I don't suppose she usually gets any, and he felt that would rather reflect on the family."

"Dear child!" exclaimed her good friend, "how can you say such unkind things? It grieves me terribly to hear you talk in this unladylike manner: surely you enjoy the flowers for no such petty reason as that?"

"Honest true I do," she answered slowly, with both penitence and humility, "though I'm awfully sorry if it grieves you; but I solemnly affirm, I would rather have flowers for other girls to see than any other reason; for the selfish gratification of merely gazing at their loveliness, and inhaling their perfume, I would not shorten their lives one instant. There! is not that a noble sentiment?" she asked, going toward Lady Davenport, and slipping her arm fondly around the old lady's neck.

"Perhaps so," she sighed. Florence was often a mystery; if she had these very peculiar weaknesses, why

was it necessary she should tell of them? Her ladyship never published her faults for her friends' edification.

"Come, my best loved, don't think me very unkind," the girl begged entreatingly, "it is human nature, that is my only excuse;" she was quiteashamed now of her honesty. "Lady Davenport, why did Napoleon wish to make himself master of all Italy and all Egypt and all every thing else? Was it love for the Italians? or admiration for the Pyramids? No indeed, it was because he gloried in exciting envy, hatred and malice in the hearts of other kings. And so you see if Miss How had received twelve bouquets, I should not have been satisfied with less than twenty-four." Florence rose to leave her. "Good-by, now you know just how depraved I am."

"Good-by," she answered sadly, "I fear I shall never, never understand you Americans." And Florence, seeing her cast a longing, lingering look at one of Balzac's novels, went away to join the others.

CHAPTER III.

AT THE FÊTE.

None of these good people were of the kind to affect afternoon assemblies, which are sure to be too warm or too cold; so the garden party was fated to pass by unaugmented in brilliancy but by two of our friends; and even their presence at that scene of festivity was an apparent accident.

Florence, blessed with that extraordinary energy which seems to characterize American girls, and having that keen appreciation of pleasure, thought it would certainly be criminal to allow an afternoon *fête*, given by military officers, to slip by without availing herself of the rare opportunity. In secret she confessed this to Percy Garritson, who, like a docile and obedient power, arranged that she should go, although it took some thought and much diplomacy.

"You see, Florence," he said, "it's no use to try and get Lady Davenport to go; I heard her call it a 'picnic', that means no go on her part."

"But it is not a picnic," exclaimed Florence. "Imagine me wishing to go to a picnic! It is a beautiful fête champêtre; you might persuade her just to take me there."

"Well, to tell you the truth," his lordship answered slowly, "I did broach the subject, but she deliberately yawned, and told me she was too sleepy to even think of it. Now, Florence, you know when Lady Davenport is 'sleepy', or 'ill', it means there is something on hand she had made up her imperial mind not to attend." Percy had made Lady Davenport a study.

"Then, of course, I can not go. There is not another chaperon within ten miles, I suppose. Oh, dear, I do wish we were in America; there the girls are so nice and respectable and well brought up, that guardians are only required on the most dangerous occasions."

At about half after four these two deceitful young people might have been seen slowly approaching the festive gathering. They had ridden far and fast for an hour, and had now decided it was time to "drop in" on their way home.

And what a triumphant *entré* it was. Florence had scarcely descended from her horse before she was surrounded by that not unusual crowd of masculine humanity who, between the ages of seventeen and three and twenty, are brilliantly stupid, and hopelessly unconscious of it; who seem to possess a sort of mushroomic tendency to sprout wherever a pretty girl puts her foot. Poor pretty girl! if with her beauty she happens to have brains or common sense! But some women are kind,

self-sacrificing, and forgiving; they believe their mission in life is to be amiable, diplomatic, and long-suffering; they are blessed with the ability for concealing their disgust for this noble throng of male admirers; and while these innocent victims are being put through a course of mental pommeling, the willful maiden appears to be enjoying this idle talk so thoroughly, and looks so sweetly rapt with her companion, that she acquires with a trifling effort the reputation of being universally popular with the old and with the young; for, if a boy of seventeen is hard to entertain, at the venerable age of seventy it may yet be a more difficult task.

Florence was good, beautiful, and wise; she was young, and wished to be a success in society; that she was willing to pay the penalty was evident from the number of hours she allowed herself to be bored. There are girls who do not think it pays, who even regard it as rather undignified, chacun a son gout. Florence was a success, that is enough.

She was no ordinary girl; with her other qualities, she had great forethought. When starting on her ride she knew in all probability she would dance before returning. This necessitated holding up her riding habit. Picture her now whirling in that oft-repeated maze, dressed in a dark-green habit, caught up and thrown over her arm, showing an exquisite petticoat beneath of crimson satin; it belonged to her very best tea-gown; any woman who might chance to look at it would at once grasp the contrivance. But the men, no doubt, believed she was always equally extravagant, and that force of circumstances alone betrayed the beauty of her petticoat.

Her hat was the most picturesque sombrero, covered with light blue plumes, which bobbed and nodded in rhythmic sympathy; and with her pretty American boots (her

pride, and her friends' envy) and long white riding gloves she was a tableau vivant of no little interest.

She danced and talked and flirted, with a great quantity of war-like paraphernalia, making Percy very miserable by being so oblivious to his presence, and so happy too without him. He should have been content had he not brought her there. But at last his feelings got the better of his generosity, and stalking across the grounds, he deliberately carried her off from the adoring multitude, to the privacy of a quasi-dilapidated summer-house, a ruin in that pleasing and lovely state of decay attractive to mortals deeply imbued with sentiment or affection.

There for a while he was happy as he watched from this safe distance, with a sort of fiendish glee, the disconsolate men who were longing to dance with Florence.

But this bliss was not fated to be of long duration; his companion was evidently much bored, deigning him hardly a word, refusing even to admire the view, on which she resolutely turned her back; seating herself on an old stone wall, she quietly contemplated the tips of her boots, until his sluggish conscience should reproach him for making such a martyr of her.

After a few heart-rending sighs, which she in vain attempted to smother, that object was accomplished, and they proceeded to one of the many flower tables, where she immediately recovered her usual cheerfulness.

Here they were both pleased, and here they remained just long enough for Percy to come to the conclusion that a "flower stand" was really the only thing necessary for the success of the *fête*, when some inconsiderate man catching sight of her, rushed up, claimed the next dance, and spoiled every thing. Percy, poor boy, was once more alone.

"Jove! what a deucedly second-cut affair the whole thing is," he groaned inwardly; "shouldn't wonder a bit if we are going to have a shower, hope we do, it will serve these men right for giving such an atrocious get-up;" every thing looked dark to Percy, as Florence disappeared in the distance.

Florence knew she should not have danced, knew she should not have come, knew every thing she had been doing was quite contrary to the rules of convenances; so she was very gay, and talked a great deal so as not to allow herself to think about it.

On her way, she met with a fresh supply of flowers. "O, how lovely!" she exclaimed as they stopped to admire them. "How I love flowers," she said, turning to M. de Plas; "but do you know, they always make me feel—well—rathered wicked, they are like some people, so exalted, so innocent." M. de Plas looked a little surprised, he had not followed readily this allusion to their mystical influence upon her; but some one behind the palms, quite near, laughed softly to himself.

"There," she added hastily, wishing to change the subject, "those yellow daisies are my favorite flowers;" and now a little disgusted with M. de Plas's non-appreciation, and very sorry for Percy, she begged to be excused a moment, while she went back to where the latter was standing hoping it would rain.

"Percy," she said sweetly, laying her hand on his arm, "to prove what a good friend I am, I am going to let you get me a bunch of yellow daisies, which have just this moment arrived. The best flowers came after you rushed off in that extremely rude manner when M. de Plas asked me to dance." Percy had not the impression that he was the one to rush off; but he was so accustomed to hearing how rude his jealousy

made him, that he never dreamed of disputing such a trifle.

And to be able to do something for Florence's pleasure was such a rare happiness for him, that when she returned to M. de Plas, he started off joyfully to procure the daisies.

But, alas! although only a few moments had elapsed, the longed-for bunch was gone. Who could have bought it? This he could not discover. It was not M. de Plas, who was rather a parsimonious youth; from that he derived much satisfaction.

But gone they were, nevertheless, and there was not another within ten miles. So he ordered, as a proof of his zeal, devotion, and regret, every thing that remained upon the flower-table to be sent to Miss Andrews at the hotel; hoping that roses, lilies, violets-wild, and hothouse plants of many kinds, would in part make up for the beautiful but absent daisies.

When prudence warned Florence it was time to leave she departed, saying good-by with little regret to those untried warriors; in fact, the afternoon had not been quite as pleasant as she expected; and she made Percy live for hours in a state of ecstasy by telling him frankly the ride there and back "was the nicest part of it all".

Lady Davenport, of course; was at once told how they happened in at the *fête*; they had been riding out, as she knew, when passing the grounds, they looked so pretty, and every one seemed to be having such a good time, they just for a moment went in; they stayed longer than a moment, they supposed; yes—Florence had danced once or twice, but they were only boys; and then every body knew she was an American, she was not expected to be as highly civilized as English girls; it was only an innocent little lark, you know.

Lady Davenport thought she did know, and understood it all, which was quite as satisfactory to every one concerned.

Oh, ye forgotten misrepresentations! whom will ye surprise on that great day of reckoning?

- "Florence," Lady Davenport said, as she was going away to dress, "here are a quantity of flowers which came a few moments since," and she drew aside a curtain and pointed to a table out on the balcony covered with flowers.
- "How like you these are!" she added, taking up a bunch of yellow daisies; "some one who is very fond of you must have sent you these."
 - "I suppose so," said Florence, carelessly.
- "And there was no card with any of them," continued Lady Davenport.
- "But I know it was Percy," replied Florence, "I asked him to get them for me; and I am going to carry them to-night; not because they are his, but I like them best; and none of the other girls will have any like them," she added, gazing at them fondly.
- "Dear child, you are not romantic," laughed Lady Davenport, "but no doubt you are happier; sentiment and heart-breaks are only amusing in other people's lives; and a woman in real life with a lover is as uninteresting as she is without one in a novel. Dear Florence," she went on more plaintively, "the world calls me a happy woman, but my clothes are the only things which have not proved disappointments." She sighed once more, kissed Florence, and went away, leaving the girl still lingering among the flowers out on the balcony.

CHAPTER IV.

CLARENCE THORNBERRY.

While yet quite early at the ball that evening one would have noticed, if they could have gotten beyond that stumbling block ego, a man leaning indolently against an old bronze figure of Pan, placed near the lower entrance of the room. He was unusually tall, but his perfect physique prevented his having that disagreeable lankness of appearance which so often gives us the impression that a man must be a greater stranger to his own boots and shoes than anyone else, and his brain is in no way responsible for the behavior of anything so remote as his heels.

Although perfectly orthodox in the fashion of his apparel and the cut of his hair, he at once struck the observer as belonging to rather a remarkable type of manhood, notwithstanding every feature had that unmistakable stamp of English aristocracy. Had his expression been closely noted, as he watched that frivolous throng of humanity which filled the rooms, it would have been but too evident that he could be both unpleasantly arrogant and unnecessarily cynical. But do not be prejudiced; most of us are apt to be arrogant, and cynical too, when we are in a crowd. Together with his strong muscular English frame, and finely cut head, which was placed magnificently on his shoulders, there was something very Southern in the half-closed, half-amused look

in his eyes, and the languid way he leaned against the bronze—a laziness almost, which, had it not been natural, would have been exasperating.

Suddenly he discovered Lady Davenport alone on the other side of the room, and although he did not hasten—some people never seem to move rapidly—he soon reached her side.

- "Good evening, Lady Davenport," he said, in a rich, mellow voice, "I have been looking for you for the last half hour."
- "Why, Lord Thornberry!" she exclaimed, much surprised. "We feared you had already commenced your career in another world. I am very, very glad to see it is not so."
- "Thank you very much. I am rejoiced it was not an unpleasant disappointment. Are all your party here?" he asked, anxiously.
- "All without an exception, I believe," she answered, lightly; "but what brought you to such an out-of-the-world place?"
- "I have a brother living here-Howard; do you remember him?"

Lady Davenport smiled incredulously, "I had no idea fraternal affection could bring you so far from home."

He laughed good-naturedly. "How you jump at conclusions, Lady Davenport," he said. "I was about to add my brother has for some time been on the verge of Catholicism, and now has not only gone over, but has joined some order of priesthood: we feel dreadfully about it. But what good does it do?"

"Feel dreadfully? I should think you would!" exclaimed Lady Davenport, bristling all over with expectant indignation. "Changing your creed is bad

enough—it is like getting your passport made out for traveling in foreign lands, or getting a card of admission to a new clique in society, when you are tired of your own set—but becoming a priest is suicide; I would rather have buried him. What did induce him to?"

"That is a mystery to all of us, for he is neither insane nor suffering from unrequited affection," Lord Thornberry answered, slowly.

"But what has your brother's strange performances to do with your being at this ball?" she inquired, after a moment's pause.

"He was not satisfied with throwing himself away," continued Thornberry, while his eyes wandered restlessly up and down the hall, in an apparently vain search for some one, "but he must waste his patrimony on an old castle up here on the hills, which he turned into a monastery; and 'pon my word, Lady Davenport, it is the most picturesque and original building you can conceive of," he added, with considerable enthusiasm.

"And are you following in his footsteps, converted by the architectural beauties of this pious retreat?" asked she, a trifle pettishly, perhaps. Lady Davenport hated to have the point of a story so long delayed. "It is quite a unique plan of conversion."

"Your ridicule is unkind," he replied. "Howard is really a very good man, and my worldliness is only more flagrant beside his piety; even his holy abode I utilize in a frivolous manner. Some one kindly informed my worthy parents that the air here was invigorating, so I have been obliged to submit to a short religious sojourn with my brother, and you can not imagine how meek and lowly I have grown, living among these saintly men. I am wildly excited by this evening's gayety, the first

I have indulged in for months; dear friend, you might well envy me, I am experiencing a new sensation. I would not have believed myself capable of enjoying a cotillon."

She looked at him a minute in a calm, serious manner, out of the tops of her eyes; she knew him too well to believe what he said. "Clarence Thornberry," she exclaimed at length, "you came here this evening for something beside the cotillon; now what wasit?"

"You flatter me," he answered, "but you have guessed the truth; I came for something beside the dance, I came to be introduced to Miss Andrews; I saw her this afternoon. What a pretty child she is!"

"Yes, she is pretty, and wise too; but be careful, when you meet her, I warn you! She is not fond of you," Lady Davenport said, slowly.

"Has she not yet forgiven me that little sin?" he asked impatiently.

"I fear not; she is very willful—so different from our sweet English girls," and she sighed deeply; "but I am glad of it," she added, after a pause, thinking, no doubt, how often those "sweet English girls" had bored her.

"There she goes on the other side of those palms," Clarence suddenly interrupted. "Let us go to her at once, or she may feel my hateful presence and escape," he added, laughing again, thinking there was little danger. He had wished to know her for the last two years, and now in five minutes that desire would be gratified. It was so near at hand he could afford to laugh now. A ball-room introduction is not an unusual occurrence, so Lady Davenport and he crossed the room with both haste and dignity, to where Florence and Percy had disappeared behind the palms.

It was a very pretty picture, that they caught a glimpse

of through the leaves. Florence was standing so that the palms almost embraced her, with their long leafy arms; she wore a violet satin gown of the most delicate coloring; her lovely little wicked head was thrown back, and her great blue eyes, quite solemn at that moment, were watching Percy, as he leaned very near above her. Had they but known it, they were looking on a tender scene; had they but been nearer, they would have heard Percy pleading earnestly that this hard-hearted maiden should care for him just a little. "Florence, you shall not find it hard," he said, "tell me, dear one, you will love me by and by;" he took her two hands in his. "After I see your father and get his consent, you will promise to care for me then?"

"But you won't get his consent," sighed Florence; "he will tell you your head is not well shaped, or he does not believe you have nobility of soul enough to comprehend his Pre-Adamite Atheism."

"But if I prove to him that the very jelly-fish were skeptics, that the mollusks repudiated the religion of their fathers in the year nine million before Adam, and embraced the enlightened views of the oyster; then, Florence—"

"Percy, dear, do not ridicule my poor old father's foibles," she said, softly; "and oh, do not ask me to care for you yet, Percy," she begged plaintively.

"But how can I help it?" he asked, despairingly, "I have always loved you, and I always shall."

"You think so now," she answered, smiling up at him, but when you wake to-morrow morning, how will it be? The sunlight will come pouring in at your window; visions of rolls and coffee will float before you. You will wonder if your cigars will last a fortnight longer, and if there is a decent barber within ten miles. Then you will

say: 'What a fool I was last night! and that girl, who prides herself on her common sense was not much better——'"

"What supreme nonsense you are talking!" he exclaimed, angrily; "you stole that entire paragraph from one of your favorite romances; if you did not, your ideas on the subject are at least dyspeptic. No, Florence, when I see the sunlight to-morrow, and you are not mine, it will not be bright to me. When I go back to my own home, I shall be lonely, I will feel I would gladly give it all for the one thing you deny me. Florence, is it so difficult to like me?" he asked, sadly.

"Well, no, Percy, I don't think it would be very difficult."

"Then," he cried rapturously, "if your father consents, I may consider you are engaged to me?"

"Yes," replied Florence, very soberly now, "on one condition."

"And that?" asked Percy, laughing for very joy.

"If I meet anyone I care for more than you, Percy, before we are married—of course, after that it would be of no use," and she sighed as if marriage was a hard trial, "you will not think me cruel if I should break our engagement; you see, dear Percy, I am not quite sure of myself, and am trying to be honest. Men are so unjust; a girl tells a man candidly she does not care for him particularly; but after a month's engagement he believes she ought to be desperately in love with him, and he thinks her a perfect fiend if she honestly admits she likes some one else better."

"What a melancholy dissertation on man's ingratitude!" said Percy, looking at her mournfully.

"And very stupid too," laughed Florence; "and now, Percy, you have held my hands quite long enough, I should like to dance," and she drew her hands from him.

"Do not let us go back to that horrid crowd," he said, beseechingly; "come out with me in the moonlight; I feel as if I should die of very joy, although your father has not yet consented, and you do not yet love me as I would have you," Percy said, half sadly.

Here Lady Davenport pulled the branches aside, flattering herself that she had been very kind to allow Florence to recover from the fatigue of dancing; for although she had seen Florence and Percy talking earnestly, she never suspected how tender a dialogue was in progress.

When Florence turned, she saw only Lady Davenport, who had come a few steps in advance.

"Florence dear," she said, "I wish to introduce you to some one, a very great friend of mine."

"Certainly," replied Florence; "who may it be? I trust it is a man."

"Yes, it is a man, and a very charming one too—Lord Thornberry;" and to be honest, Lady Davenport, as she mentioned his name, looked a trifle alarmed, and well she might be.

Florence shot daggers of scorn, her dignity became transcendent. "You know, Lady Davenport, it is quite useless to wish to introduce that man to me. I will not know him," and her voice shook with anger.

There was a horrible silence. "Percy, we will dance," Florence said, at length, turning toward him. "Lady Davenport, pardon us passing you," she added with suppressed rage, sweeping by with the feelings of an injured Medea. As Florence disappeared, Clarence joined Lady Davenport. As he had overheard the most of the conversation, he too was furious; a pleasant situation for her ladyship.

"This is child's play," he exclaimed impatiently; "the absurdity of that girl, who will allow a cub of a boy to stand ten minutes holding her hand, refusing to be presented to a man, because two years ago he was so wicked as to take her picture from a photograph album," and he laughed, but not merrily. "You must train this little savage better, my dear Lady Davenport."

"Alas!" she replied, "I fear her early American association will always be ruinous to her self-control."

"Does she know any thing?" he asked carelessly, "or has she only her pretty face?" The subject already wearied him, but then one must talk.

"My dear boy," she exclaimed enthusiastically, "she knows every thing." Lady Davenport was really very fond of Florence, and she also felt her remarkable behavior on the present occasion somehow reflected on herself. "She knows every thing," she reiterated, "from A. B.C. to psychology. She paints, she is a fine musician, and I assure you she speaks every European language from English to modern Latin." She added with pride, "Why she can even converse in half the dialects, Magyar—

"Magyar!" cried Clarence, interrupting her, "does she know any thing about Magyar?"

"She speaks it as if she had never heard any thing else." Lady Davenport was gratified at his surprise.

"Then, by Jove!" he exclaimed excitedly, "if she has the least heart whatever, she will do the most charitable of deeds, and know me at the same time within half an hour;" he was more animated than he had been for years.

Meanwhile Florence had rushed Percy through the ball-room. She was greatly incensed at Lady Daven-

port wishing even to present Lord Thornberry to her; for the entire bitterness of her nature seemed to be directed against him. And it all arose from the most trivial of misdemeanors. One day he had taken her picture from an album he was looking through, at a reception given by Lady Ione; he had taken it, he frankly admitted, because he was so irresistibly charmed by the lovely piquancy of her face. Soon after committing this theft, he had gone to Canada on a visit, so he had never yet met the owner of his stolen treasure. Unfortunately some malicious person had informed Florence that he had boasted of being able to get as many pictures as he desired of an American girl to whom he had not yet been introduced. Hence Florence's ire.

Have you ever noticed when we are very much offended with one person, how apt we are to be particularly kind to another? So it was now with Florence.

The next half hour was to Percy a perfect dream, she was so charming; he poured forth his love to his heart's content; and what to a lover is greater bliss?

"Dear Florence," he murmured, "only say you will some time care for me a little, and I shall be quite content."

"I do already care a great deal for you, Percy; look at these flowers," and the wicked girl looked smilingly up in his face; "I chose to wear them of all I had. Are you not pleased?"

"No, I am not," he answered bluntly, "I did not send them," and he regarded them with any thing but an approving gaze; "somebody else had that pleasure, I was too late."

"You did not send them! who could it have been then?" and Florence observed her bouquet with augmented interest; "it is too bad." "Did you think I sent them?" asked Percy, much comforted.

"Of course I did, or why should I have carried them?" At this his state of mind was beatific. "You sent the jacqueminot roses?" she continued. "How I wish I had known it before." Still she thought to herself, red roses with this gown would be atrocious.

Just then a servant from the hotel made his appearance. "A note, mademoiselle, for you," he said, handing Florence a slip of paper. Going toward one of the gas jets, she opened it, and read—

Dear madam: Accidentally hearing that you understand Magyar, I have taken the liberty to beg you to perform a most charitable action in behalf of one of your fellowbeings. There is a poor Hungarian peasant dying here—a Robert Plazty—who has sent for me to confess him; unhappily I can not comprehend a word he utters. Think of the kindness you would be doing him, and the Church also, if you consent to be his interpreter. We have been in great difficulty for some hours past, as he seems to have many sins on his conscience. I regret so solemn a duty calls you from a scene of festivity, but it will only be for a short half hour. I trust you will not fear coming alone, as it is particularly desirous he should be disturbed as little as possible; the bearer will wait to conduct you here."

"But, Florence, you are not going?" exclaimed Percy. "What impertinence those old duffers are guilty of!"

"Of course I am going," Florence answered. "Which is of the more importance, this ball, or a man's salvation?"

"That is very different. You know his salvation does not depend on you or this old priest," said Percy, a little disdainfully. "Well, he believes it does, so it amounts to the same thing. Suppose, Percy, he has done something very wrong, it will be a comfort to him, poor fellow, to imagine he is forgiven."

"Do as you like, but I shall go with you," he said determinedly.

"Percy, I would so much rather you did not," she replied slowly.

"But I insist upon going; do you imagine I would trust you to a servant?" he asked.

"Very well then," she answered hastily, "if you do go, when I so seriously object, I shall not dance with you again this evening; I shall not even come back for the cotillon," and she looked at him defiantly, knowing how much pleasure she was threatening to deprive him of.

"Well, what do you wish me to do?" he asked doggedly; "I know I am a fool to give in, but I always have, and suppose I always will."

"That's a dear good boy!" she cried, putting her hand caressingly in his; "go and explain it all to Lady Davenport; you know exactly how to put it. It is only a step, and I really would prefer going alone; and when I come back, you will find me nicer than ever."

After a few more tender expostulations, which were of not the least avail, he did as he was bid; making her solemnly promise, however, that she would surely return, return too, in time to choose their seats for the cotillon, and not allow any silly sentiment to keep her from coming back. It was only a Hungarian peasant, after all; when she had dispatched him into the next world, she would rejoin them in the German, which was certainly a pleasanter occupation.

CHAPTER V.

A STRANGE PROCEEDING.

ALONG the dark avenue, darker for the brilliancy she had left, Florence sped on her way.

There was a strong fascination about the whole affair. Being called from a ball, and her lover, to a poor peasant, who in the soft caressing Magyar would confess his sins, seemed to her the very essence of poetry and romance. It was so unusual, so out of the ordinary, that it delighted her, and for the moment she forgot it was connected so closely with death.

His name is Robert Plazty, she thought; it does not sound very wicked; perhaps he is a Nihilist; and she thereupon built up a series of crimes worthy of the very lowest circle in the Inferno.

She had come without her wrap, had left even her lace bournous with Percy; just as she had gone from the dancing-room at the end of the last waltz, she went to this unknown death bed.

Upon the many stairs she climbed, up and up, at last fearing there would be no end, until she finally reached the topmost story.

She looked at her daisies, which she still carried, and wondered who could have sent them. The mystery had naturally doubled their value. "They must have come from some one who is very fond of you," Lady Davenport had said. No one was fond of her in that way

but Percy, in this part of the world; who then could it be? And wondering still, at last she reached a wretched little room. A priest stood at the open door, whose decrepit hinges groaned with age, or thirst, perhaps, for a few drops of oil, as it closed upon her when she entered.

"Dear lady," the holy father murmured, "you are truly good to come so quickly; forgive me," and he bowed low, "for doubting your noble generosity, when my brother told me you would gladly make the sacrifice. Brother, she is as divine as you have said"—he turned toward the bed as he spoke.

Florence looked across it; she could discern nothing in the somber light but the outline of an indistinct form, leaning against the chimney piece.

"The admiring brother is another old idiot of a priest, I suppose," she thought. "Good heavens! they pity priests for not having family ties; what a mistake when they call half the men they meet 'brother';" and her nervousness almost made her laugh aloud, as she thought of a man with a wife, and one puny infant, feeling sympathy for a lonely priest, who had perhaps 7,000 brothers. While this voluble young priest continued his harangue, the most wildly absurd ideas rushed through her brain.

Did this holy brother admire her violet satin gown? Would it surprise him much to inquire if he had ever had a love affair? And what would he do, if she should insist on dancing an Indian war-dance, telling him it was their national remedy for all diseases, moral and physical!

Suppose she should break out in the Marseillaise, or an air from some opera bouffe! How foolish she had been, not to let Percy come with her! It was so cold up here, and so strange, alone with these three men! She had an intense desire to laugh, and a more intense one to cry. Why did not the other brother interrupt this dissertation on her generosity?

"Dear madam," he was still talking, "the Church will appreciate your sacrifice in coming here to night."

"Well I don't think much of the Church," she cried in desperation, hoping to stop his endless thanks, "if it believes it a sacrifice for a woman to give up a few waltzes to help a poor fellow creature to what he thinks is salvation." Her indignant protest ended in a little sob. She was very frightened; it was so damp, and dark, only a dim candle lighting the room, and a few dry sticks burning on the hearth. There was the smiling young priest; there the shadow of the unseen brother: the dying man stretched on the dingy pallet; the music of the ball still ringing in her ears.

"You are good, mademoiselle; you know the importance of the confessional?" he continued.

"No, I am not good," she replied, "and I don't believe in confessions at all, but I want to help this poor man, if he is in trouble," the sobs followed each other very rapidly now. She buried her face in her daisies; they at least were her friends.

"Little one, do not be frightened," she heard some one say, and looking up, she saw the brother bending over her. He was not a priest; her heart was filled with gratitude; he was human; worldly perhaps, like herself. Oh, the relief of that discovery! She felt his unspoken sympathy had made her strong.

The sick man groaned. "You will pray for him, that is all," he said kindly, "poor fellow, he can not live now, much longer."

She did not reply, but went quickly to the bed. She

was not at all a religious woman, as the world has it, and she had never seen anyone so near death before; but she was very calm, and very quiet now.

Bending toward him she said in Magyar, "Robert, there is some one in heaven calling you, are you ready to go?"

"Ready to go?" he murmured, "I am only waiting, waiting until they will forgive me, and let me go." Then catching sight of the priest, he poured forth a volley of misdeeds. He was young, he was lazy, he loved his master's beautiful daughter; he married her; and they were very poor, so terribly poor." The man shuddered with horror, as he recalled that time of suffering. "Then she became ill," he went on; "this drove me mad. I stole some jewels, very valuable ones; and for a year we were rich, and oh! great heavens, how happy! and then-my beautiful angel discovered how I had gotten money, and -and-it killed her." He tossed about on his couch; his excruciating agony was fearful to witness; he believed being kept in this world was his punishment. "Will I never be forgiven?" he cried beseechingly. "My angel in heaven, tell them how poor, how miserable we were! This heartless priest will not listen to me; he refuses his blessing, and we will never, never, see each other, or be happy again."

"But he will bless you," Florence interrupted; "he has not understood what you were saying." The poor man turned as she spoke, and seeing her for the first time, seized her hand. "She has sent you," he exclaimed, "to take me to her; you have come to tell me I am forgiven. God is more merciful than man." He fell back quite exhausted, but thoroughly content.

The priest was very solemn, as he listened to Florence's explanation. He had fully expected the recital of a murder, or some horrible crime, which would require a long and painful confession. He was a young man, and had not sped many souls on their heavenward way as yet; and when one gets one's expectations up, even about terrible things, there is a sort of disappointment to find them falling so far short of our first idea. Still, perhaps it would be unjust to say this good man regretted not confessing a greater criminal; for to steal a few jewels to procure bread for his wife is not so very wicked, considering how lenient the Church is toward the dying.

"Robert, you will be forgiven; you will see your beautiful wife, if you are sorry you stole the jewels," said Florence softly, kneeling beside him.

"But I am not sorry," he answered. "I would steal them all again for that joyous year with her, my lost one!"

At this there was great wrath on the part of the holy father. "Can it be possible that there lives a man so depraved, that he would lose the blessed future for one year's pleasure on this sinful earth?" he exclaimed vehemently; it was beyond his comprehension; he could not forgive without repentance.

Florence translated his words as mildly as possible, but the dying man was still firm in his refusal. "I am sure of that one year's happiness," he said wearily. "What do I know of the future? Who can tell me of it, for a certainty?"

This incensed the pious man to that degree that he considered Robert lost without doubt.

"Unless you repent for stealing a single morsel of bread to feed your dying wife, you are damned," he cried indignantly.

"Then I am damned," shouted the peasant, who had

guessed the meaning of the words uttered by the angry priest, and his emphatic gestures of denial. Once more the blood went rushing madly through his veins; he found strength to partly raise himself in his bed, and bending toward the confessor a look of mingled terror and defiance he continued: "For her, I would steal the whole universe! Did I not make her poor? That was my only crime; and for that, I would wish to suffer; but to be able to make her happy, I would glory in the curse of Heaven." Weak with the effort to justify himself, he fell back on the couch, hopeless as to forgiveness, in this world, at least.

"Good sir," said Florence, going toward this stalwart son of the Church, "be merciful, I beg, to this poor creature; in a few moments he will die. The Church, you say, is generous; be so lenient as to give him some hope of a happy future, without exacting from him a repentance which would be a lie. Think how much easier it would be for him to comply with your demand; to simply say 'I am sorry I stole the jewels'; than by his truthfulness to thus tempt, as you say, the wrath of Heaven."

"He is the most depraved of sinners," the priest replied. "He rejects the mercy of God. I must, at least, do my duty."

"I warn you, do not be too cruel," said Florence, coldly, turning from him with unutterable scorn.

"His spirit must be subdued," he muttered. "No unrepentant thief can ever enter the kingdom of heaven. Be so kind as to tell him this."

"I shall not," she exclaimed, passionately. "This heart-lessness is too much; I refuse to repeat it to him." She walked toward the door; the very atmosphere had become loathsome with this man's bigotry.

"Then you, too, are cursed," he cried after her.

"For you have on your conscience an unredeemed soul."

"Howard, Howard," said the voice of the brother. He was about to say more, when the dying Hungarian, groaning painfully, lifted himself in his bed. "Tell him, I am sorry," he murmured hoarsely, "if by that means I shall see my beloved one again;" and his eyes wandered pitifully from Florence to the priest.

"Have I come here only to add a lie to this man's list of crimes?" she asked, mournfully, as she slowly came back into the room. "You are wicked," she cried, standing before the holy father; "so wicked that God must hate you for your indifference to this man's suffering; you degrade your Church by this assumption to judge so brutally another's faults. And I adjure you, as you wish some day to be at peace with your Creator, to pardon, in the name of your Church, that man his offenses, without this feigned repentance." She was no longer a child, but a woman, bravely demanding justice. "Let him go down to the grave with at least the hope which has been given us all as our birth-right."

He was completely astounded at this outburst from the child who had been so affected, a few moments before, merely by the sight of the wretched man; and he was ashamed before her.

"As you say," he replied, humbly, after a moment's pause, "perhaps it would be better. You may tell him the Holy Sacrament is prepared."

Florence turned to him again, and impulsively offered him both her hands. "I thank you so much," she said, gratefully. "Forgive me, if I was rude; but you are all a mistake; you are trying so hard to be good that you make yourself very bad."

If it were possible, the good man was more surprised

at this candor than he had been at her indignation. He was so astonished he was unable to reply, but turned, with a startled, imploring glance, to the corner, where the brother still leaned against the chimney-piece, and whence came just the suspicion of a laugh. Florence evidently expected no answer, for she went immediately to the bed side. With great difficulty she convinced the peasant that his sins were forgiven and the priest stood by to administer the Sacrament.

The perfect peace which he acquired with it, proved that Heaven echoed at once, and joyfully, the tardy blessing of the priest.

And now it soon must be over. Florence kneeled again to pray a last parting prayer for his soul.

The two men stood aside, watching her, and watching the dying Hungarian; they could not understand the soft exquisite words she said, but they saw the wonderful calm come over the peasant's face; the suffering, the anxiety faded away; then his eyes closed slowly, and he was dead.

But Florence was unconscious that they watched her. She little knew that never in her life had she been so beautiful as kneeling there beside that miserable bed, her ball-dress lying in heavy folds on the bare wooden floor, her head thrown back, her eyes seeking heaven through the dusty rafters above, still clasping her yellow daisies as if for strength in her difficult task. For once the "silly, heartless little American" forgot herself; forgot this world and its selfish pleasures; she was alone with the angels and the dead. But it was too much for her, her head fell on her hands, and for a moment she fainted. Suddenly she looked up.

"Come," said the brother, gently, "it is over. Poor little girl, you have suffered enough for another's sake,"

and raising her from the floor, he took her hand, and led her away. At the door, she turned to the priest. "Goodby," she said. "God will bless you for making that poor man content at last."

Then she allowed herself to be led on, as if in a dream. All at once she found herself descending the rickety staircase.

The building was, in fact, in great danger of falling to pieces. It had been originally a granary, and was now converted into a lodging house.

Florence had, naturally, never been there before, and as for her recollection of her coming this evening, it consisted mainly in climbing any number of similarly rickety stairways in going to the room she had just quitted. She was therefore entirely dependent upon her guide; and it was with dread of crushing in the fragile flooring that she took every step. Have you not noticed that one's weight always seems increased in old, time-worn buildings?

It was not long before she also discovered that her hand was tightly clasped in that of her unknown friend. This was terrible; but when she unfortunately stumbled over some spiteful nail, which had poked its head out of its hole to watch this very improper and unusual proceeding, this man, this unknown, this mystery, put his arm deliberately around her to prevent her again falling. What should she do? What should she say? Nothing, was her wise conclusion, or he would regard her as one of two horrible things—a prude, or a very foolish young woman. In fact, if she tried in any way to escape from this trying position, he would then be certain that she was conscious that his arm supported her. So she finally determined to appear blissfully ignorant of her surroundings, although it was rather difficult, for, owing to the

darkness, they went very slowly, and it promised to take a long time.

Now, to be going down five flights of very old stairs, lighted here and there by the dimmest of tallow candles, with an unknown man's arm about you, and your hand held tightly in his, is not an ordinary situation; and all the horror of it struck Florence most forcibly. "This is not a bit worse," she tried to reason with herself, "than to dance with a perfect stranger in the cotillon." But it was worse, or at least usage had not authorized it, and she fully appreciated that to be the case.

"If I could only think of something to say," she thought. In her mind, she traveled from "a charming night" to grave questions on Catholicism; one was ridiculous, the other much more so. She could imagine the cracks in the wall grinning at her embarrassment; she could hear her little French slippers telling the stairs about it, and chuckling at her discomfiture. What could she say? "You haven't an idea, you haven't a thought worth uttering, and if you gave your very head, you couldn't find one," the very air seemed to cry. Suddenly her feelings got the better of her; she turned to him saying:

"You are very kind, but, oh! I would a great deal rather stumble than have you hold me so. I am sure it is not proper; and—and you can not be very comfortable." She ended it in a little gasp.

"No, it is not proper," he replied, placidly, "but I am quite comfortable, thanks, so we will continue in the same way."

"No, we will not," she exclaimed, indignantly, and, wrenching herself from him, she did stumble in her burst of independence.

There was a low, amused laugh above her; she was

tenderly picked up, and they descended in the same manner as before.

"What a fool I was!" she groaned inwardly. "How glad he must have been that I fell; he actually laughed; I wish I had hurt myself, then he would have been sorry for me; if I could only say something brilliant to redeem my reputation." Still racking her brain, they reached the doorway.

Meanwhile, Clarence Thornberry—for of course he was the brother—was also hard at work to find something comforting to say. "Poor little girl," he thought, "it has been too much for her; she will not take part in the cotillon this night; she is ready to burst into tears at any moment; I trust she will not be ill. How beautiful she looked when she was praying; she must have a great deal of sentiment; perhaps this will prevent her from ever dancing again. 'Called from the ball to a death-bed.' It is really tragical. I imagine she is now wandering with those two, Robert and 'his angel', in heaven."

Thus idealizing his companion, picturing her on her ethereal way with Robert and his beloved, when she turned to him and said quite cheerfully: "I suppose all the good seats in the german are taken?"

Alas! she was not wandering in heaven, she was not sentimental. It was a fearful shock; he fell to earth with a sickening sensation of disappointment.

"If we hasten, you will probably be able to procure one," he answered, icily.

"Then let us hasten," she said, "for I am very anxious."

He groaned. It was not a heavy groan, hardly more than a sigh, but her delicate ear caught it, and from her lips came its echo.

"I knew you were not enjoying yourself," she said,

plaintively; "but I was not either. Don't you think," after a pause, she continued, "that purgatory must be built like a stairway, and the lower you go, the more frightful it is?"

"Gad!" he cried, and a long, ringing laugh floated off on the air. "My ideal is shattered into bits; five minutes more and I may be called Mephistopheles himself. We are here, ma'moiselle," he added. They had reached, by this time, the ball-room. "My brother and I are most indebted for your kindness." He bowed low to her, as if he anticipated being dismissed.

"You have been very good to me," Florence said, looking up at him wonderingly. She did not know exactly how to interpret his last remark. Giving him her hand, she went on, "Will you do one thing more? Will you wait here for a few moments? I may come back; I may want you."

"Yes," he replied, calmly, "I will wait; I understand perfectly; you are fond of sherbet?"

"Very," she answered. "Good-by, then, for a short time."

"Good-by," and he smiled bitterly as she left him to go to Lady Davenport, who was sitting near the door.

"Bah!" he murmured beneath his breath, "I could have died for that girl, had she but been above a cotillon and sherbet for just this one night. What a fool a man feels when he sees his mistake!" and savagely attacking the strongest cigar he possessed, he strolled up and down. "Waiting, confound it!" he growled to himself, "until that child requires a little sherbet to help her through the next waltz. Jove! old man," he exclaimed, violently apostrophizing himself, "don't be such an ass as to go in and dance also, if she should happen to request it." He had entered on the third quarter of

his cigar, and his thoughts were taking a revengeful turn.

Florence's account to Lady Davenport of her adventure was not a long recital; in five minutes she had described, in the most graphic manner, all she desired should be known of the little episode. One or two details she omitted; it was hardly the time, hardly the place, to speak of the conflict between a dying man and a servant of God. But all that was necessary to tell, she told so well that Lady Davenport readily consented to her saying "good-night" when she begged to be allowed to go home. In truth she astonished Florence mightily by not demanding an immediate introduction to the "delightful brother", who was not a priest, and who had so kindly promised to await her return; for, although she had fully expected a dissertation on the unconventional American girl, she had bravely told Lady Davenport how charming a part Clarence had played in the evening's performance, little thinking that this "interesting man", as she called the unknown, had given Lady Davenport a glimpse of the romance before it had taken place.

"Go, my love," she said to Florence, at parting; "you must indeed be tired. Wrap yourself up warmly; and tell your kind friend how heartily I thank him for his consideration, and that I trust very soon to have the pleasure of meeting him myself. You know, Florence, my dear," she added, "I should not let you go alone with him, except that it might hurt the priest's feelings if we in any way seemed suspicious of him or his friend; you understand, my child?"

"Indeed I do," exclaimed Florence, her mind greatly relieved; consideration for the good father's feelings did away with all impropriety. "It is so delightful to be introduced by priests or ministers, for then the people are always sure to be respectable." Upon which sophistry Lady Davenport, a wise woman, smiled.

At that moment Percy came rushing up. "At last!" he cried. "Well, did the gentleman leave on his heavenward way with his passport well made out?"

"Oh, Percy, hush! you don't know how dreadful it was," and Florence covered her face with her hands.

"My darling, forgive me," he exclaimed, all repentance. "What a brute I am! You will forgive me, won't you? I have been worrying so about you, and it was so miserable watching the door, that when I did see you I forgot every thing, except you had been carried off by a filthy old priest and his—his—patient; will you excuse my nasty brutality?"

"Yes," sighed Florence, "on one condition; that you go directly, and ask Miss How to dance the german."

"Oh, ye gods!" groaned Percy. "Ask Miss How to dance the german! Who are you going to dance with?" he asked, much hurt.

"I am going home."

"What nonsense," he cried, angrily; "you shall not; I will not allow it."

"Now, Percy, dear," said Florence, tenderly, slipping her hand through his arm and looking the look he could not resist, "what you said just now made me feel very badly, but I will forgive you all, every word, and play lawn-tennis with you to-morrow morning, if you will do as I wish."

"Does Lady Davenport know you are going?" he asked, as a last hope.

"Yes."

"Then come, I will take you."

" No, Percy; Miss How is all alone, and they have

commenced long ago; so good-night, dear; I would much prefer you staid."

Poor Percy was furious. He had a way of getting furious that Florence found very unpleasant. He supposed one of her many warlike admirers was waiting to take her home, so both pique and anger prevented him from urging her further, and he marched off with much dignity.

"Good-night," cried she after him. "Good-night again, Percy; please miss me a trifle."

This quite softened him. "Good-night," he murmured. "I am sorry you are so tired: I trust I am forgiven."

CHAPTER VI.

THE COTILLON.

When Florence returned to the entrance of the ball-room, Clarence Thornberry was lazily leaning against the door, not even taking the trouble to watch the dancing; he was still thinking—thinking of women and what fearful disappointments they usually proved. He had never met a woman whom he honestly admired, until this evening, and now she—was like the rest. It was a great bore to be obliged to wait there until this child wished to flirt with him. The noise they called music was fiendish, the men were snobs and the women ungainly. "And am I expected to take part also in this childish pastime?" he muttered, impatiently tapping the floor with his foot.

- "Just then he heard a voice. "I am ready now," it said, close beside him.
- "Oh! certainly—of course—yes—pardon me—" he stammered, as he offered Florence his arm, rapidly marching her off to the supper-room.
- "Why, where are you going?" she exclaimed, much bewildered.
 - "To get you some sherbet," answered her escort.
 - "But I don't want any sherbet," said Florence.
- "Well, what do you want?" he asked; "brandy and water?"

" No."

"You don't want me to dance with you? Perhaps to get you a good seat?"

"I want," Florence said, with a sort of gasp, "I want you to take me home."

Clarence stood transfixed. She wanted to go home! What had happened?

"Could you not find a place?" he kindly inquired.

"Yes, I had a lovely one saved for me."

"Well, had you no partner?"

"Yes, the best dancer here was my partner. Oh! how can you be so cruel!" she broke out vehemently. "Do you think I could be so heartless as to dance tonight? I was anxious about a seat for Percy Garritson, because his enjoyment would be spoiled if he waited for me, and I wanted to make him stay and have a good time, so I had to find him another partner. I did not wish him to take me home, because he would ask questions, and I hate questions. I was in hopes you would be willing to; but no matter, it is not far, I can go alone. I thought you would understand, you were there."

It was a little thing, but that childish burst of explanation, showing how considerate she was, and how unlike her it would have been to remain there, gave him more pleasure than any thing that had befallen him for years.

"I do understand," he murmured, softly; "forgive me." He took her cloak, wrapped her in it, with much unnecessary tenderness, and then, putting her hand in his arm, they went away together.

Neither said a word. They might have traveled the short distance in perfect silence before either of them could have found any thing to say.

But when they had passed the palms, and were out in the long trellised walk, Florence stopped suddenly. "Oh,

my daisies! I have lost them," she cried, turning back. "I can not go on without them."

"Well, sit here beneath this palm," he said, gently, "and I will go and look for them." He smiled to himself as he left her to find the daisies.

In a few moments he returned. "Here they are," he said, handing them to her; "but do not rise; let us remain here for a little; we will both rest better afterward for it."

"As you like," she answered him, wearily. "I am so glad you found my flowers, and so tired."

She was tired, poor little girl; he could easily see that by the listless way she leaned back in the garden seat, overshadowed by the palms, watching the people go back and forth.

They had been sitting there some time when Clarence, who had never taken his eyes from her face, said: "Miss Andrews, before our friendship goes any further, I wish to ask you to forgive me for being so stupid and unkind as to even think you could dance to-night. Will you pardon me?" he asked, entreatingly, bending toward her.

"It was very natural of you to think as you did," she replied, slowly. "All my life I have been a silly, heartless girl. I have danced many years away. I am surprised at myself for not being in there this evening. But, oh, it was horrible!" and she shuddered as she recalled the painful scene. "That man screaming on the couch, and that sleek, fawning young priest. Do you know," and she turned seriously to him, "I think even a priest can be verdant." Her companion gave a low laugh.

"That sleek, fawning, verdant young priest," he said, "is my brother."

"How your brother?" and she laughed too; "you have not frightened me at all; you are not a priest."

"No-not exactly. Come to the monastery to-morrow afternoon with Lady Davenport, and you will discover how I am his brother."

"I will if I can," she answered, eagerly. "I am very much interested in priests just now. I am always interested in any thing I dislike extremely."

"And you dislike priests?" he asked, greatly amused.

"Yes, I loathe them. I do not believe they can know or love God very much, for they always pray to Him through the assistance of minor personages. Now could you," she continued, very gravely; "could you really love your father, no matter how great and good he was, and feel that he returned your love, if you were obliged to go down on your knees to another whenever you wished to thank him for some benefit or pleasure he had given you?"

"No, it would not be love; it would be intense veneration," he answered. "But I fear you do not kneel very often to any one."

"You are right," she replied, sadly. "I hardly ever go down on my knees; it is so uncomfortable. And then I hate to pray regularly, as if I were taking my bath or eating my dinner, for I believe that any thing which grows into a habit will surely lose its sanctity."

"And when would you advise people to pray?" he inquired.

"Why, whenever they feel like it, of course; whenever they have any thing to pray about. I do not believe God likes us to get on our knees and then not know what we are there for; to meander in and out, through many meaningless expressions, and a quantity of vapid praise, which He knows we do not feel; wishing all the time we had been there long enough. And then, to believe this a divine communion with our Creator! Oh,

it is horrible—it is lowering to every thing that is holy."

"And if you do not pray regularly," he asked, earnestly, after a long pause, "do you pray irregularly?"

"Yes, very irregularly," she said, almost regretfully. "I go for days without praying at all, and do not feel so dreadfully wicked; then I often pray all day, while I am walking, playing lawn-tennis, driving, dancing—I think I have prayed more at balls than any one place. You know, of course, nobody knows it. I just make my little prayer, and the man beside me goes on with his silly chatter; and I get great comfort from it, too. But, oh dear, I am a very wicked and heathenish girl; and what is much worse, when I look honestly into my heart, I fear I do not care to be a whit better." And she sighed as she ended her confession.

"By Jove, I never met a more depraved young person!"

"You need not ridicule me; I am really wicked," she said, mournfully; "I realize it every day."

"It is most deplorable." To him, it was exquisite pleasure to hear her talk; giving him a glimpse of the strange sacred side of her character, which the world had never guessed. He knew he was so fortunate, only because she was excited, and had forgotten she was talking, not thinking. No one had ever seen her in this mood before; and she was like a child, pure and innocent; unseared as yet by the world she lived in. "And what do you pray for at balls?" he asked, at last; "I can think of but one thing." He wished to make her speak again.

For a moment, she looked at him a trifle scornfully. "No," she said, "I do not pray to heaven to send me a number of dancers, or that the other girls will look ugly,

and be neglected. I ask God to some time give me a higher aim than all this frivolity. To some time show me how silly and selfish it all is; and when I am older, for Him to make me crave a nobler and a better existence; and let me leave it, all, willingly, and of my own accord choose a wiser path, and do some good for having lived my life. And now I am very tired; will you take me home?"

He gave her his arm, without a word. He could not speak; every syllable she had uttered more plainly proved to him the wrong impression the world held of her; unconsciously he pressed her arm nearer him. "Lean on me heavily, little one," he said, tenderly; "it was cruel to keep you out there so long."

"Oh, no, I enjoyed it so much; but," she added, quite humbly, "please don't think me very bad."

"Indeed I will not," he answered, emphatically; "you have taught me a wonderful lesson, for I have always confined my prayers to my own bed-chamber or the sanctuary—two places where I am sure to be sleepy."

"Tell me," said Clarence, when they had nearly reached the hotel, "why do you cling so persistently to those daisies?"

- "They are my favorite flowers, and they came in such a mysterious way," she replied. "I think some one very charming must have sent them."
- "Now," thought Clarence, "my fate, and my way of carrying on the siege, shall be decided."
 - "Would you like to know who sent them?" he asked.
 - "Oh, could you tell me?" she cried, delightedly.
- "Yes, I saw them bought and paid for," he answered, much amused by her anxiety to hear.
- "Quick, then," she exclaimed. "Who was the man? do tell me."

"You take it for granted it was a man," and he laughed heartily. "Well, it was a man, and the man's name was—Clarence Thornberry."

The daisies went whizzing yards through the air.

"What is the matter?" he cried, much surprised at the violent effect of his information.

"Clarence Thornberry! how I despise him, and his flowers too," she exclaimed, passionately. "How I hate him for sending them to me! Good-night," she added, as she hurriedly left him, so he should not see the angry tears she knew were near by. The thought that she had treasured and loved those daisies all these hours, and that Lord Thornberry had probably seen her with them in her hand, was too much for her to bear.

After Florence's sudden disappearance at the entrance of the hotel, Clarence strolled slowly back to the ball-room. The temporary building erected for the occasion was only a square or two off, but in traversing that short distance he did much thinking. Never before had he run through the gamut of emotions in so small a space of time.

He had gone through life, every one caring for him and his pleasure. Women particularly had flung their love at his feet; and he, alas! too indifferent, trod on, not caring to gather the flowers which would have so willingly garnished his path. But he was never censured; the world never called him bad names. To him, women had grown positively irksome; although having myriads of love affairs, the love was usually on the other side, and he rarely suffered when the severance came, as come it invariably did, after a not very protracted period.

"Why do women, as soon as one knows them well, cease to be attractive?" This was his constant complaint.

"I am very fond of Lady Philippa. I adore her, in fact; but I try not to see her often; I am afraid for my esteem, for my affection, which I should like to prolong as far into the season as possible." And although this sounds conceited, it was not meant so in the least.

But here was a girl of an entirely different type from any he had ever met before; whose face he had admired for two years; whose picture he had always with him, carried simply for the sake of its beauty. And now he had met the owner of that fair face; and he found her worthy of it. Her soul was purity itself. Toward her he did not feel the same as toward other women; he felt he must know her better; see her more; she would never tire him, that he knew full well. And she had passionately flung away the daisies, simply because he had sent them. How would she have acted had she known who he was? She would never speak to him again. That, too, he knew.

When he arrived at the ball, which was now on the wane, he went at once to Lady Davenport, and sitting down by her side told her all that had occurred, in every particular.

"And now you see, dear Lady Davenport, since I have met her—met her, too, in a manner I would almost regret, had it not been so delightful—what am I to do? I must see her again; I must teach her to care for my—my friendship, before she discovers who I am. Then, I trust, she will not give me up."

"But who did you tell her you were?" she asked.

"She seemed perfectly indifferent to the fact that I could possess any thing so disagreeable and unnecessary as a name," he answered. "But tell me, what do you advise?" And he looked anxiously at her,

For some minutes Lady Davenport remained thinking earnestly. Then she smiled, gave her hand a complacent little tap. "Lord Thornberry," she said, "draw your chair up nearer." He did as he was bid, and together they commenced a grave consultation.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MORNING AFTER.

The next morning could hardly be called pleasant. It was a day when if one wished to assume an ultramarine frame of mind, there was no reason for not doing so. Nature promised to be quite sympathetic; no sunbeams would smile sweetly, but aggravatingly, on your bad humor; no birds, chirping merrily, would tell you, like certain well-meaning friends, how unnecessarily ill-natured you were; everything was in melancholy harmony.

As each member of the party descended to breakfast, and heard the fall and drizzle of the rain-drops outside, each felt the gloom echoed in his own heart.

Nature was brave and honest; she made her grief audible; her tears ran down the window panes; she sighed and groaned on the breast of every tree. But these good people were obliged to hide their little annoyances, or their dear friends might be tempted to proffer unwelcome pity for some supposed misfortune; and pity, deserved or undeserved, noisy or silent, is objectionable; so they felt compelled to appear cheerful and bright as they entered the room.

There was no actual reason why these several persons should be gloomy or sad, except, perhaps, the fact that they had had a "particularly jolly time" the night before; and that is almost excuse enough for any one being gloomy the next morning. Why is it? Because the pleasure is gone by—never, never to come back, leaving

an empty gap, which anticipation had filled for a certain time before? Or is it because the pleasure has proved itself so vapid, so shallow, that a sort of self-loathing steps in; a self-disgust, that one can really enjoy such frivolous things. How often it is necessary to find an excuse to hush that rude, dictatorial second self which is so constantly demanding apologies for any little peccadilloes we may too willingly commit.

Now, Lady Davenport was quite complacent; she had sacrificed herself; she had gone to the ball simply to please the others. To be sure, she had enjoyed herself immensely; but that was good luck; her conscience need not be restless.

All were out of humor, with the exception of Lady Davenport and Florence. The latter had retired in a most disturbed state of mind, and when she awoke in the morning, had that not unusual feeling of depression which arises from some momentarily forgotten cause, the passing shadow of some unknown evil, which all no doubt have suffered. But when she had catalogued her actions of yesterday, regulating her ideas sufficiently to discover the disagreeable sensation arose from the mortification of having so unwittingly carried Lord Thornberry's flowers, her relief of mind was great at its being no worse a cause, and she suddenly became so astoundingly happy that her condition surprised even herself; for remember it was still early in the day.

But then, had she not met the most charming of men the night before? Had she not played a most extraordinary part in a most interesting adventure; which in broad daylight lost its tragical character, and left nothing but undistilled romance.

"But what a little fool he must have thought me. The idea of talking to him about saying my prayers, as if he

were a nursery governess, or a father confessor! By the way," she added, slowly, "I do wonder who he is; I never thought of that before; and how is he that priest's brother? Well, I shall at least know all about him to-day; he promised to explain, if we would go to visit the monastery. I do hope and pray Lady Davenport won't object when I propose going this afternoon." After which soliloquy she descended to breakfast, humming "Verlegenheit", which proved her blissful state of mind.

"How did you all enjoy yourselves last evening?" she said, addressing the whole table, as she entered the

room.

"O!O!!O!!!" exclaimed the elder How, who had forgotten to lay aside her patched and mended juvenility, which, although very fine at night, sheltered by the gas and gayety, looked like the most forlorn toggery in the morning's unkind stare.

"We just had the most elegant time imaginable," added her sister, who felt the How dignity in danger of falling if only supported by three exclamations, which often mean *nothing*.

"Sure, for a French affair, it was not bad," said Maurice Fallon; "but then Miss Langdon was there."

Private imprecations from Miss Langdon. We all know a man is an idiot to ever exhibit undue devotion, particularly in public—except with a very few women. As a rule, a girl invariably desires what she can not have. Oh! the charm a man loses, when he allows both the woman and the world to know that he loves.

"Yes, we did have a very good time. I think Harold Beresford and I danced oftener than any two other people in the room." Sweet is a retaliating snub, even when we love; so, at least, thought Miss Langdon.

"By Jove!" Beresford answered, "we did. I would

a deal rather, you know, favor a girl than be her partner, you know; have so much more dancing, you know; more satisfactory altogether; voluntary admiration, you know." This young person always gave the people with whom he conversed the credit of having a previous knowledge of every subject possible to strike, no matter how adroitly he navigated his little craft through the abstruse creeks and streams of conversation, you know.

"Carrie Langdon and I, you know," he continued, "have danced together for years and years. By Jove! you know, I could have throttled that wild Frenchman when I saw him rushing round in such a violent manner with you tucked under his arm.

"Quite helpless like," put in Maurice, feeling some remark was expected from him. "I noticed his wretched dancing myself."

"Come, that's too good, Maurice," and Beresford roared with laughter. "You and he danced as much alike as swallows following each other in their flight."

"I hate that Frenchman; he is such a fool," exclaimed Percy. He had a fellow-feeling for the unhappy Irish lover. "I hate him, his collar is so oppressively jovial."

"Good, Percy," said Florence, approvingly, between a sip of coffee and a bite of roll. She was happy, but she did not despise her breakfast. "You can judge a man more by his collar than any feature heaven has blessed him with. The set of his collar is acquired by his own labors; his progenitors have nothing whatever to do with it; for all they care, he can go without the aforesaid article altogether; in that case he is disguised, masked as it were."

"Not collared, you mean?" said Percy, who felt he grasped the intricacies of the subject.

"Exactly!" replied Florence, much gratified. "Col-

lared, you are a slave; your style, your thoughts—every thing is laid open for the world's inspection."

"So you think a collar is a subtle spy on a man's individuality. How perfectly absurd!" said Lady Davenport, who was never sure whether Florence was making a fool of herself or others.

"Indeed it is not," Florence answered, quite earnestly. "All great theories have been laughed at at first. Just fancy a Sabbath-school superintendent with a négligé collar! If a man dabbles a little in art, he wears a Byronic one; we meet him in the street, or stumble on him in the ball-room, amidst a crowd of men wearing high, stiff, practical collars; we know he is a dilettante; if a dilletante, no matter how exalted his position, there are moments in his life when he is consumed with envy, perhaps of a starving artist, who he sees has a future before him which he, in his higher social career, with all his wealth, all his rank, has no time, no genius, no energy, to rival. And we detect his secret yearning—how? By the depression of his collar."

"Mein Gott!" exclaimed the German member, "do you include the neck-tie?" and he clutched a brilliant red one.

"Of course. Now if a man has a gorgeous diamond collar-button, and he arranges his tie so as to make the stud a sort of head-light, why we all know what he is, don't we? You," she said, as a sort of apology, "have the most charming neck decorations," and she gazed at them all with such an air of truthfulness, that every man present firmly believed that she spoke individually to him.

"I never imagined," said Lady Davenport, "that one could say so much on the stupid subject of collars."

"Now, what I want to know," said Florence, cheerfully

ignoring her ladyship's reproof, "is who received the most favors?" and she turned to the girls.

"I only got twenty-six," sweetly acknowledged the youngest How.

"I don't care much for favors," said her sister. "I only care for dancing. O! how I do adore dancing!"

"Well," said Lady Ione, in a frank, manly, honest way, "I am very fond of favors, and I received a great number; but I gave them all to my partner to take home to his little sister."

"The favors were fearfully ugly. I have often gotten more in London, where, O! they are so sweet," enthusiastically cried Miss How.

"Thank the Lord," said Beresford to Percy, in an aside, "men don't row it about paltry favors. How can girls?"

Percy looked skeptical. "No, they don't row it, I will admit, but they feel deucedly put out, if they see some lucky fellow getting more than themselves."

"And now, may we inquire how many favors you received?" asked Miss How of Florence.

"I did not get a single one," she replied, meekly.

"Alas! they had not even noticed her absence," she thought. "What is fame?"

"You did not get a single favor?" the maidens, one and all, exclaimed; not however with that soothing air of sympathy one might have hoped for. They looked at each other triumphantly; a sort of ocular hand-shaking took place. "Joy!" they seemed to cry, "her success is over! Well, they had been expecting it."

But Percy could not stand this supposed neglect. "She was not at the german; she passed the whole evening at the death bed of a Russian peasant, who could not speak a word of French or English; poor fellow, con-

found him! confound him! for taking her off." Which Percy was most provoked at, could hardly be guessed.

"Why, Percy, what an immense fib you are telling!" Florence exclaimed, blushing terribly. She would not for the world have these silly people know how she passed those few hours. "I was having a lovely time out in the moonlight, by the century plants, listening to Keith Munfort reciting Tennyson's 'Maud'."

Keith Munfort had adored Florence ever since she was a little girl. Last night he had been suffering agony from neuralgia, in his own private apartment; but he was quite ready to have it supposed that he was otherwise blissfully employed.

"By Jove!" he answered, with great animation, "I wager I enjoyed last evening more than any man here, with Maud and Miss Andrews both in the garden. Nothing less than paradise can compare to it!" But no one took up the wager, probably thinking the betting would be all on one side. The smile Florence gave him made him feel that, wicked as it might be, he would willingly lie on forever, were he to be so rewarded.

"Come, Percy," Florence said, going toward the window. When she knew men well, she treated them in a trustful, sisterly manner, which they enjoyed in inverse proportion as it shocked maturer minds. "These people feel stupid this morning. I can see it by the indolent way they sip their coffee." Knowing she spoke the truth, they all looked up reproachfully. "Pray, don't feel hurt," she continued; "being grieved rarely pays. You know well, with the exception of myself, not one here has relished his breakfast. You all have bad tastes in your mouths, left over from last night's sweet-meats."

"O! ye gods!" cried Beresford. "In vulgar parlance, she would insinuate we were bilious."

"No such thing!" exclaimed Florence, hastily. "I was speaking in a very elegantly metaphorical manner. Although I believe you are right, and every one of you is mentally bilious. For once be honest. Acknowledge that none of you can digest the silly, unwholesome trash you talked and listened to last night."

"That is true, mademoiselle," answered M. Chevalierre, the Frenchman. "When I think to myself the nonsense we talked, that little Russian countess and me, my whole soul feels as if it needed a clearing up; as if it ought to go to the mountains, and let the winds and rains straight from heaven get to it, sweep out the rubbish in the corners, and brush down the cobwebs hanging on the walls of my brain, which make me feel neither as good nor as bright as I might." After which florid confession he modestly retired behind his empty coffee cup; the vacuity of which he for some time failed to discover."

"A secret unloosed!" cried Percy. "Chevalierre has been up all night. No man could poetize so early in the morning, if he had not been out of bed the night before."

"Indeed you are wrong," said Lady Davenport. (Why do women always come to the rescue?) "Monsieur Chevalierre's remarkably humble confession shows what an excellent night's rest he must have enjoyed to so fully recover his usual common-sense."

"Chere madame!" exclaimed Chevalierre, going toward her. He had once, long, long ago, loved Lady Davenport, and men are very kind, very considerate to the women for whom they have once felt une grande passion, and who, alas! have grown old while they are still young. "From you," he said softly, "alone from you, could I have hoped for this defense—this goodness."

"Ah! that is not fair," interrupted Florence. "You

know Lady Davenport better than you know any of us. We are all capable of the same amount of goodness, in behalf of a man who dares to be sentimental over any thing as prosaic as his morning chop."

"I trust Monsieur Chevalierre does not imagine we are all as disgustingly frivolous as he has painted himself," blandly remarked his German foe, who thought Chevalierre was having too pleasant a time. "For even when the brilliancy of the stars and moon mingle with the light and warmth of a ball-room to make us reckless, even then we are men; how can we be frivolous?" And feeling the beauty of his paradox, "How could men be frivolous?" Far outshining his enemy's "mental cobwebs", he too tried to drain an empty cup.

"Pardon, Herr Oberteuffer; you forget the Germans have not that ready suppleness—that delightfulness of adaptability, laughing with the gay, weeping with them that mourn. It is his ready sympathy that makes a Frenchman so charming in whatever society he may be cast. The Germans are all sediment; the French effervesce."

"O good gracious!" cried Florence, fearing something too brilliant might be said; "how awfully rude we are all getting. When a man tries to drink coffee from an empty cup, and adds unnecessary syllables, why you know the height of insolence is reached. Now, like two seraphs, come and make up, for I do hate to be outdone in rudeness; and I can not now think of any thing very impertinent to say; but the truth is, I do not see any one worth being impertinent to. Bien! voulez-vous me donner le biscuit?"

[&]quot;Florence," said Lady Davenport, "as usual you are talking supreme nonsense; and so early, too."

[&]quot;Dear friend, you hurt my amour propre. I wish to

remain awake a few hours, and if I allowed myself to look silently at you too long—I speak collectively—your stupid, sleepy mood might be contagious."

"Great heavens!" murmured her ladyship pathetically, "imagine an English girl daring to be so saucy. She would be banished from the drawing-room for days."

Florence, apparently all repentance, flung herself down by Lady Davenport's knee, and taking her two hands, looked up with such a sweet confidence and truth, that she made a beautiful picture of filial devotion. "Dear one, I can not regard you as a severe duenna—a strict and dreaded guardian. I have indeed tried to be afraid of you—but no, I can not. I always feel you are my dearest friend; a delightful confidante; wiser, but no older, than myself. Now will you kiss me, and make up?"

To all of which Lady Davenport smilingly assented.

Dear reader, I am not transcribing this conversation either for its wit or profundity; these are nineteenth century people, innocent of such qualities; we are all ordinary to-day; the world knows too much, has read too much, to be witty or original any longer; all that is worth saying has been said. It is useless to try to converse uniquely; for the clever speech one is about to utter, whose parent one flatters himself to be, has no doubt been safely bound up in printed books for years. We can imagine Aristotle even, incensed at Socrates for living a generation before him, and getting a corner on an idea that he might have possessed.

Perhaps Hypatia and Aspasia were wise only because the world was still young, and the finest thoughts had not yet been monopolized; brilliant, also, because the other women were stupid. Fortunate is it for them they lived in the age they did. If Hypatia lived across the square, and Aspasia on the next above, what would their fame be now?

So we must laugh at wretched threadbare jokes, since there is nothing better; and if we did not pretend to see wit where no wit lieth, our zygomatic muscles would become too rusty for use at any time. We must be interested in bores, and be bored with ourselves, because we are polite members of polite society.

"Is there any one here," asked Florence, rising, "who would not prefer something horrible to happen than nothing at all? Dreadful must be the catastrophe which would not be welcome. You are cross and disagreeable, because you are expecting a long, stupid day. *Ennui* always results in murder or suicide if kept up long enough; so be comforted."

"Really, Florence," said Lady Davenport, "your last speech was exceedingly trite, quite beneath your dignity; but I confess it was redeemed by the novelty of your first remark. How do you judge that we are so deprayed as to enjoy a calamity?"

"Well—now—" Florence slowly answered, feeling after she had made a ridiculous assertion justice demanded she should stand by it—"now," and she searched her brain for an illustration, "suppose Percy and I should go out driving, and in half an hour a story should reach you, that we had been attacked by a band of masked men, mounted on exquisite steeds; Percy had been wounded and I carried off amid oaths, screams, and triumphant singing; would you not unconsciously smack your lips over something so tragical, at the same time so romantic? For the moment you would enjoy it immensely. So like the old days of chivalry, so poetical, so like Paul Clifford, you would think. Even if Percy were to die, and I never be seen again, the excitement would be pleasant.

Hush, hush," she exclaimed, as they were about to interrupt her; for she felt her sophistry was making an impression; "of necessity you must enjoy it, because it would break the monotony. You perhaps would not realize it, but you would feel awfully disappointed, and not a little injured, if you saw us both placidly strolling up the path, munching nougat contentedly, when you had anticipated seeing Percy brought home covered with gore, and hearing that I had wedded an Hungarian lord who already possessed two wives. In some secret recess of your hearts' anatomy, you would feel as if you had been cheated; and we would not be welcomed with open arms, but be treated coldly all day, for not having been killed or carried off."

A volley of reproaches was hurled at her from all directions as she finished.

"You impute exceedingly strange sensations to your friends," said Miss How, very shocked; not that she felt it would be impossible to feel as Florence had described, but the folly of telling people how base one could be!

"I believe all Americans are cannibals at heart," added Lady Ione.

"Well, you may call me a cannibal, if you like," Florence answered, slowly, a little sadly, too, perhaps; "but you are all longing for something, and are afraid to call it by its real name. I judge you by myself. I would rather suffer, than feel nothing. The news of Percy's valet having run away with Miss How's maid and Lady Ione's jewels, would be a relief; and if we heard the British Isles had been swallowed up in the English Channel, we should have something to talk about all through luncheon. Your hearts, bodies, and souls, cry 'Excitement'; you believe one good ball

not only deserves another, but positively demands it."

"What sublime nonsense you have talked this morning," Lady Davenport said, for the third time; "not a sensible word for two hours."

"Dear one, I am perfectly aware of that fact," she calmly replied; "but one must talk, and remember what Mallock says about 'conversation being like champagne'. And it is so much easier to indulge in non-sense than worry your brain to say something clever, which nobody is going to thank you for."

"By George! that's true," exclaimed Percy. "No one should be held accountable for what they say in society. We talk to fill up, as we eat bread with patê de foie gras."

Florence looked radiant. "I am so glad some one understands. Oh! how much I should prefer being considered bad, wicked, insane even, than stupid. And now farewell, mes chers camarades. Percy and I are going out in the rain, to try and seek adventure for your amusement."

CHAPTER VIII.

AN INTERLUDE.

FLORENCE and Percy started off on their dewy walk, trudging cheerfully on, up the narrow streets of the town, in the pouring rain. Interviewing all the picturesque persons they met on their way; always finding some excellent excuse for so doing by inquiring the way back to the hotel, or some other bit of important information.

They regarded these good people as a sort of human bonbon, of a most delicious flavor. True, it sounds rather cannibalistic, as Lady Ione said; but it was so much pleasanter to listen to the quaint wisdom of these old town folk, in their charming patois, than pretend to feel interest in the stupidity one had to put up with at home. And then, too, these adventures, and conversations with the peasantry, always furnished such unique dinner anecdotes, which Florence thought as necessary as a becoming gown.

But the other members of the party regarded it as a very peculiar amusement, and really could not discover wherein the enjoyment lay. It was entirely owing to this habit of talking to the children on the road, to the old men and women in the shops, that Florence had acquired her remarkable knowledge of the European dialects.

While they were thus amusing themselves, the others

were quietly remaining at home, wishing they were anywhere under heaven but there, yet lacking the energy to move. Lady Davenport, however, must be excepted. She was safely barricaded in her own room, and, strange to relate, entirely occupied with her own thoughts, a diversion she rarely allowed herself. She hated "to think", and for once she was obliged to. It was absolutely necessary that she should think, and think quickly too. She had promised to arrange some plan, apparently accidental, so that Florence should see Lord Thornberry that afternoon at the monastery. But how could this be done? If the rest went, he, of course, would be recognized, and Florence would discover who he was. Lady Davenport was very much interested in this meeting. To her Clarence Thornberry was nothing more or less than an excellent parti for Florence. And Florence was the only human being, besides herself, whose happiness she had ever considered; which was a noble tribute to the girl, when we think of the circumstances, and how selfish the world is generally.

But Lady Davenport knew that beneath this phosphorescent gayety, there was a depth and generosity that would have surprised many of her friends; that in her heart, some time, if not now, "Mercy and truth would meet together; righteousness and peace would kiss each other."

Meanwhile her ladyship was thinking still. She knew it would be most difficult to keep the others at home, and if they went, they must of necessity see Thornberry. It would be useless to appeal to them to keep secret his identity; people are not romantic in crowds. They would regard it a rather good joke, and tell her his name as soon as they returned home, in order to witness the effect in the most satisfactory manner,

One's greatest deeds are generally inspirations. Suddenly Lady Davenport seized her portfolio, and in ten minutes a note was dispatched to Clarence. Then, once more, with a sigh of relief, she exchanged her own thoughts for Ouida's.

At luncheon, after much serious deliberation as to how it would be best to put it, Florence proposed, in the most careless and indifferent of manners, that it might be amusing to visit the monastery upon the hill, as the day had grown so pleasant.

"Indeed it would!" exclaimed Lady Davenport, as near enthusiasm as she ever permitted herself. "The sun is trying so hard to behave itself that we ought to take the will for the deed, and encourage its efforts by going out." Good humor and poetical fancies always went hand in hand in the brain of this worthy woman; in fact, she was so heartily grateful to Florence for broaching the subject, that she was radiant for some time after.

Now she might appear ignorant of any previous arrangements; and this particularly pleased her, as she was most desirous Florence should not know that she was in any way acquainted with the friend of last evening; as that might lead to a discovery of who Lord Thornberry was, which would be a most disastrous denouement.

As every one firmly believed Lady Davenport's schemes for amusement would rival those of the monks of Alcobaca, and that she could have suggested something much more unique and enjoyable than Nero's harmless chef d'œuvre could she have interviewed that old reprobate, they all thought Florence's proposal a most perfect idea, as long as that great power approved it.

They would go to vespers in the chapel, and through the monastery afterward. The going to vespers was really imperative, for it alone did away with the possible imputation that mere vulgar curiosity took them there. But, to be honest, one must confess that it is not seldom curiosity puts on the frock of piety.

So at five in the afternoon the entire party set off,

like so many devoted pilgrims.

CHAPTER IX.

A VISIT TO THE MONASTERY.

In through the open portals of the saintly abode they went, leaving behind them the world of man—a world of mingled ugliness and sin, of goodness and of beauty. Given by God, with all the love and compassion that a father could bestow with a dangerous gift, which might bless with a wondrous joy, or carry in its trail the tortures of hell.

Up through the woods they had come, over the path which but rarely felt the pressure of any but saintly feet. The sun would soon be sinking, tired, it seemed, with its efforts to shine through the mist and the rain; weary, as many a heart is, which has struggled to do what God has not willed.

The shadows were long and heavy, turning the whole forest into fantastic silhouettes. But the little patches of green that the sun, making its way between the branches of the trees, called out to bid "good-night", proved how deceitful appearances are, for, had the woods not already donned their dominoes of shade, it would have been found that the sward here was as ordinarily green as common-place grass in less romantic localities. The birds were chanting their Ave Maria, accompanied sympathetically by the waters of a little brook softly running over the pebbles of its stony bed, and at each interlude some stray breeze could be distinctly heard, whispering with those gossipy old leaves

which never can be quite silent, and which having drunk deeply of the morning's rain, seemed readier than ever to discuss their neighbors' affairs.

From the world of nature they went into the world of sacrifice and prayer.

The monastery was an old castle, which had never been occupied. It was built in the beginning of the reign of Louis XIV. This is sufficient to tell of the unnecessary profusion in its erection. But the downfall of the state followed so soon, that the unfortunate owner never enjoyed living in the home he vainly hoped would descend to posterity as a substantial evidence of his wealth and unrivaled taste.

Just as it was, it had stood for centuries, waiting to offer shelter to some tired mortal who might there seek repose; looking, meanwhile, calmly down on France, amid all her trials; seeing the light creep slowly forth after the long protracted gloom; watching and waiting through all her adversity, as well as prosperity; having no call made upon its hospitality—until a few years ago it awoke to find itself a cloister. And it was a sad, dreary awakening, after so many winters and summers of sleep, for those walls that had thought to see the merriest lives go their merry way.

The architecture was a wild conglomeration, half moresque, half Christian, built utterly without plan or design of any kind. Here was a Catharine wheel-window illuminating a Corinthian stairway; there Tuscan columns supporting Gothic arches. But nature was kind, and graceful, clinging vines had wound the eastern minarets and northern bartizans in such close embrace, that it now looked like an exquisite medley of the past.

As the visitors entered the bronze archway, a sudden hush fell on their gayety; soft, plaintive music seemed sighing in the distance; it was like the threshold of a better world; very different from the vespers in the great cathedrals of the town, where the crowds come and go, each intent on his or her own prayer; where the priests bless the multitude, with the same pious regularity, day after day.

Here, it was like spying on a man engaged in his secret devotions. And they feared almost intruding upon these holy men, at their evening service in the dimly lighted chapel. It was small, but of marvelous perfection, where one would be inclined to worship some object, were it but the beauty of the sanctuary itself.

In through the cinque-foil openings poured the rays of the sinking sun, making the brilliant coloring of the walls brighter by this borrowed luster; but mingling with the candle light, it threw pale, weird shadows on the pictured saints, looking calmly down from above. The floor of the chapel was of malachite and brass; a strange combination, almost barbaric. This part of the building had been chosen for public prayer, because there was less of this oriental splendor here than elsewhere. But here, even, it appeared in a most incongruous manner. There were remarkable, wild, unknown beasts, carved in alto-relievo on each side of the entrance, which could hardly be Biblical illustrations. Between each window was an abacus of ancient mosaics: just below the annulet of each column was a brass serpent, wound round, with its head half severed from its body, the interpretation of which had died with the architect. The consoles, built in the frescoed walls, were of mother of pearl, and showed out pure and beautiful from the gorgeous hues of their background; on them were placed statuettes of saints and martyrs, taken from the niches of other churches. The altar was of the purest marble, as was also the baldachin under which it stood. The rich somberness of the rest of the chapel threw this spot in high relief; its luminous whiteness was almost startling. Around this the monks were kneeling.

Some one came forward to receive them, and they were soon put at their ease by discovering that the service here in this strange, fantastic place, was the same as in the far-away St. Peter's.

"Florence! Florence!" said Lady Davenport, "they have finished, we are going to look at the dungeons." And seeing Florence did not move, she continued, more emphatically, "Come, come, it is all over, and we are to see the rest of the castle. Are you asleep? or do you wish to be left behind?"

The girl had quite forgotten Lady Davenport, and the others. She was thinking—thinking of many things; wondering whether the Virgin Mary was really such a beautiful woman as they represented her to be, and dressed as gorgeously as her magnificent picture behind the altar bore witness. Whether she should see her friend of last night; and whether he would remember whether those monks had all been disappointed in love, and had entered the brotherhood on that account: for to her this was the only solution of so strange an act. Whether they were really saying their prayers; and whether they believed she was saying hers, and how dreadfully mistaken they were if they did. Then she went on wondering about the chapel, and the artist who planned it, if he had much difficulty combining the antique with the modern. Whether Heaven blessed a church in proportion to the money expended in its decorations; and so on, each thought displacing the other. until they left her in a drowsy maze.

She arose slowly, and followed Lady Davenport, leaving

her dreams, like a bunch of faded flowers, behind her in the seat she had quitted.

With two priests leading the way, they went through the old castle, up and down, along narrow passages, at the end of crooked openings, out into broad hallways, through gigantic arches.

Perhaps, even in this holy place, the flesh and the devil waged war with the angels. But although they saw the monks file past them, going to their evening meal, and met many a tardy one in the different chambers through which they passed, not once did Florence catch a glimpse of her friend, and feeling tired and disappointed, having lost all pleasure in the looked-for visit, she followed the others languidly, hardly understanding their enthusiam over objects which to her seemed really very ordinary.

As they passed the chapel again, on their way back, to look at the upper part of the cloister, Florence stopped at the entrance, amazed at its loveliness, in the pure candle light. Some one was playing on the organ, a sad, plaintive Te Deum; and knowing they would not miss her until they returned, as Lady Davenport was keeping Percy by her side vigorously occupied, she stepped in, unable to resist the fascination of that solemn tranquillity.

The perfect peace, and the weariness she could not explain, made her sad. "Ah, this is the way it is when one dies," she murmured to herself. "Your friends, and your enemies too for that matter, come with you as far as the sanctuary; and then you drop behind, and they go on alone, soon forgetting you traveled with them even that far." Going toward a small Prie-Dieu, she sank on her knees, and her tears, slowly falling, found their way to her clasped hands, and told them she was weeping.

She was not crying because she was grieved at not seeing him—he was already him to her—but because she was so perfectly alone; because it was all so beautiful and strange, in the candle light, with the sainted people on the wall. And somehow God seemed very near.

Softly the solemn music sent up its song of praise to heaven, stealing out through the windows which the curious moon had just then reached and was trying to peep through. Just as the moon beams had touched the edge of her gown, thinking perhaps she, too, was a martyred saint, condemned in effigy to pray forever, and, growing bolder, were softly creeping all around her, she heard a footstep coming near, and nearer. She crouched down, with her head bowed lower, hoping that, be it a priest or one of her friends, she would be passed unnoticed. But no, she heard some one come forward, then stop directly behind her. Yes, they must be there watching her, wondering what she was praying so earnestly about. Suppose it was Lady Davenport or one of the others, how they would ridicule this unwonted sentiment on her part. She was afraid to look up.

"Little one," she heard some one say, after a long pause, "little one, I did not think to find you kneeling here in a position you once said was so uncomfortable. May I help you in your devotions?"

She did not answer; she dared not turn. That voice so low, so tender, so entreating, held her there. A spasm, half joy, half anguish, swept through her whole being.

- "Little one," it added, after a moment's silence, and a quiver of regret rang under the words, "have you so soon forgotten?"
- "I knew it must be you," she cried, joyfully, springing from her knees, the pleasure of seeing him outweighing

her transitory dread. She offered him both her hands. "I am so glad," she said, honestly, looking up at him with that sweet, childish trust. "I was so afraid that—but oh!"—and she started back—"oh, what has happened!" She looked at him questioningly, her eyes dilated with horror, her hands fallen lifeless in his.

The dress he wore was the same as the other monks.

"I trust nothing very terrible has occurred," he answered calmly. "What is it you fear?"

"I understand now," she gasped, "how you are his brother," and she turned from him, so he should not see her tears. "You are a priest."

He laughed a low, amused laugh; not at all like a member of that holy order should have done. "And is that very dreadful?" he asked.

"It is horrible!" she exclaimed, passionately; "it is awful! How could you?"

"It is really not a difficult operation," he said. "At least I did not find it so."

"But when was it? When did it happen?" she persisted.

"When did what happen, little one?"

"When did you do this horrible thing? When did you become a priest? You were not so last night."

He would like to have flattered himself he detected much sorrow in her voice.

"I believe I am exactly the same, with the exception of my outer raiment," and he smiled quietly to himself. "Then, too, I have sacrificed my mustache; that is the extent of the change, I assure you," he replied seriously.

"Ah! yes," she said, slowly, "I see it all now. This morning you were admitted into the brotherhood. You

would have spent last night alone with that dying peasant, had I not dragged you to the ball. There you took one last look at all you were giving up. I wondered why you did not dance; why you were so sad. Oh! how could you leave it all? Think, only think what you have lost." She gazed at him pityingly.

As she had explained it all so satisfactorily to herself,

he merely bowed his head in assent.

"What I hope to gain in its place, is infinitely more precious than what I lose," he answered, softly.

"Do you mean heaven?" she asked, in an awe-struck manner.

"Yes—heaven upon earth," he replied, earnestly. "Something I have longed for many days."

"You must have been very wicked," she said, sadly.

"But you do not look unhappy."

"Yes, I have been very wicked," he admitted, humbly; and I have been sorely punished; but I am not unhappy now."

"I do not understand," she said, in a dazed way. "I thought all monks were miserable." She turned suddenly to listen. "Here they all are; I must go. Good-by. I am very, very disappointed to have found you in this way. I feel you are worse than dead."

He felt for a single moment the pressure of her cold little hand; then she was gone, and he was left alone with the memory of the sob he heard as she passed out of the chapel.

CHAPTER X.

RETROSPECTION.

"O FOLLY! folly! the froth of vanity, the attribute of man and beast. Which have I been-more foolish or more wicked? A woman's capricious nature, can it ever be counted on? With Percy so ready to care for me, why should I long for the admiration of this one man? I remember, when a child, hearing a story of a conceited little bantam that once leaned too far over a brook, when it wished to say good morning to itself and give the pond a chance to see what a pretty chicken it was; but getting its feet wet, it did not find it comfortable; and, what was still worse, the stupid water never stopped to take the least notice of its fine form and lovely speckled feathers. Silly bird! who asked you to smile at your own image in the dangerous pool? Why should you complain and call it unkind, because it wet your feet instead of smiling back? Who asked you, Florence Andrews, to fall in love with this priest? Heaven knows he did not. No, no; conceit and vanity brought trouble to both you and the fowl. Your folly reached its climax when you imagined, because a few men admired you, this one was also bound to. It is not one whit more surprising that he should take the vow of celibacy after meeting you, than before. I am ashamed of myself, utterly ashamed. For twenty-four hours I have acted like the silliest of school girls. This nonsense

must be stopped at once, or I shall lose every atom of self-respect."

This stern mental soliloquy took place that evening at dinner. The severity of her self-condemnation was entirely due to the fact that Florence suddenly realized she had been in a sort of stupor, and that, had her life depended upon it, she could not have told one solitary action she had performed since leaving the chapel. How she met her friends, she did not remember; her coming home; dressing for dinner; what she had said and done in the interval; all was a perfect blank. It was not like sleep, but death. The awakening was not that of the soul only, but of every nerve, every fiber, after an unreckoned intermission.

And what had broken the dream so suddenly? The taste of perdreau truffle, her favorite dish. It had been put before her, like many other good things; unconsciously she had tasted it; a second mouthful, and she recognized the flavor. Then she knew she was still upon earth dining, and that there were others at the table, who were probably talking to her, and wondering why she was so distraite. The third bit of the delicacy impressed her yet more forcibly with the fact that she must be in a very wicked state of mind not to be enjoying this dish still more. To this savory mentor she humbly bowed, and began her mental chastisement.

When she had finished, it was with some anxiety she looked down to see if her gown betokened her inwardly perturbed condition. No; it was a great relief to find herself at least decently attired. But to her surprise, she found a bunch of yellow daisies in her belt. "Oh joy! Perhaps he had sent them to take the place of those she had thrown away." But alas! no. Percy at that moment commenced thanking her for being "so

awfully good" as to wear his flowers. She turned to him, sweetly receiving the poor boy's words of gratitude.

She had found them on her dressing table, and mechanically put them on. He did not owe her much, for while she smiled at him her heart was sick with disappointment that the daisies had not come from another.

"Will you walk a little with me, Florence?" Percy asked, after dinner. "I wish to tell you a very sad bit of news." But she was not quite sure of herself as yet, and she hesitated.

"Won't you go?" he urged, bending tenderly over her. "Florence," he cried, suddenly, "I believe you are miserable too."

She looked up surprised. She did not expect him to be so pathetic. With a sort of pitying caress, she laid her hand on his arm. She realized then how difficult it would ever be for her to feel the love he so ardently desired. "Percy," she said, slowly; "I do feel a little miserable, but why should you be so? how can I help you?"

"You know the help I long for," he murmured. "Will you give it me?" And he looked at her beseechingly.

"Oh Percy! wait a little while; wait half an hour. I must think first. Then I will come back, and we will take a walk; we will go out by the sea and confess our troubles, and try to cheer each other a little." This sounded very strange, coming from Florence. Poor child! she felt as if her heart needed something like a cold shower bath, to wash away its wretchedness. But Percy knew her so well, he was never surprised at any thing she might do. He calmly strolled up and down the corridor, patiently waiting her return, made happy by her promise to do so. To be sure, it was not flattering that she should leave him, merely for the pleasure of

thinking in her own room; but, as every one said, "Florence was certainly very queer."

When Florence reached her room she flung herself down before the open window; there was a close bond of sympathy between her and nature; and here she tried quietly to consider the state of her affections. She had been bitterly disappointed in her supposed discovery at the monastery, and she did not hesitate in admitting it; forgetting, perhaps, that the mystery which overhung this man, and his apparent holiness, added an hundred fold to his charms. But now a praiseworthy exhibition of common-sense redeemed her folly; she calmly sat down and wondered how long her regret was going to last, and to what extent it was mixed with chagrin; and arrived at the wise conclusion that something must be done to break up this sentimental lethargy.

Finally, rising, she left her solitary moonlit balcony, and entering the room went to her dressing-table. On it was a grand confusion of flowers, laces, a little innocent powder, and a great quantity of unctuous ointments and sweet-smelling perfumes. In one corner were a number of beautifully jeweled rings, strung unfeelingly on a common ordinary lacet de corsage, lying modestly between a two franc mirror and a chintz pin-cushion. Rings were the only jewels Florence cared for, and all her friends had contributed to her collection, until they were really famous for their beauty and value. Fine as they were, however, she always carried them on a vulgar string, or a prosaic piece of tape; and, with few exceptions, wore them with the greatest impartiality. "And as they are not half as useful as my brush and comb," she once said to Lady Davenport, who was calling her careless, "they shall have no better care." So one was as apt to find her fortune of rings in her sponge bag, or the toe of an old slipper, as in her jewel case. Taking up the string, she selected a large intaglio, which could easily have girded one of Goliath's fleshy phalanges. Touching a spring, the ring opened, and she took out an old yellow letter, written in the finest handwriting. "I have indeed fallen sadly," she sighed, "when I read my venerable aunt's epistle for comfort."

"BELOVED NIECE:

"(Which, believe me, is merely a figure of speech. You are my niece; more's the pity for you and me; but not in the least beloved, for you are nothing more than a howling babe at the moment I write). The gods may, however, unkindly allow you to survive that obnoxious period, so I, for the sake of appearances and perhaps future benefits, I, your Aunt Belinda, send you a ring; but spare your thanks. I have not an uglier one in my collection. When you are grown you will discover that the meaner the gift the more advice always accompanies it.

"You are a girl! Well, heaven help you! 'Tis the women who carry the hod in this day—but hods don't all weigh the same; here are a few rules to make them lighter:

"1st. Cultivate your mind; a woman's great danger lies in her heart being large and her soul small.

"2d. Never consider any but your own comfort (which advice, if you are a good girl, you will not follow).

"3d. If you are foolish enough to love (every woman's pitfall) don't believe all that the man tells you, for in that imbecile condition you are as blind as a bat, and can't see that perchance he is the veriest rascal that the land holds.

"4th. Never love first, or you ruin your chances as well as having the man's contempt.

"5th. In your quarrels (and the devil may send you plenty) always be the injured one, for if you are not, the opponent will, and thereby gain untold advantage.

"6th. Never waste your time on unprofitable work, or people, for the years slip by quicker than you think.

"7th. Never throw away your social position for a fortnight in a calves' paradise that will not last. When you
marry, think if you are likely to be friends at fifty as well
as lovers at twenty. Have as little as possible to do with
your relations, and avoid intimacies, remembering the
wise old prayer, 'Lord, keep me from them whom I
trust; for from them in whom I do not trust I will keep
myself.'

"Your dutiful aunt, who cares for no recognition in either this or the next world, if it be our misfortune to meet."

Florence finished this legacy of words with a happy little laugh; her mood was entirely changed.

"There, Aunt Belinda," she exclaimed, "I am cured of my folly for the present, at least; no one is going to repine after reading your letter, which attacks sentiment in such a cold-blooded manner."

It is marvelous with what facility mankind poultices his battered affections, and with what creditable success he is rewarded.

After putting away her letter on which had fallen a few unaccountable tears, the girl went back to Percy, who felt he had waited hours, not minutes.

The moon was high in the heavens by this time; its silvery light tenderly caressing and softening the sharp outlines of our every-day world. The long, deep shadows gave a mystic loneliness to the scene, while the never-ceasing rush of the ocean seemed a glorious Te Deum sung by nature, in its greatest thankfulness to God. They

walked up and down, silently watching the sand, with its restless fringe of sea. They knew each other too well to feel they must speak. The time had passed when it was necessary to be entertaining.

"I am going away to-morrow," Percy said at last; "my father is very ill; he wishes to see me once again—before he—goes."

"Before he goes! You do not mean he is—is—dying?" gasped Florence, standing quite still, her hands clasped tightly on his arm, her face raised anxiously to his. "He is only just ill? That is what you mean, Percy?"

"No, Florence, I am going home to say good-by for the last time," he replied, with a half sob, "and God grant that I may not be too late."

Poor boy! he was very miserable.

"If we had not gone to vespers this afternoon," she said, regretfully, "you might now be on your way to England. How sorry I am I proposed it. And now it may, indeed, be too late."

"Yes, it may be too late. I had a presentiment that visit to the chapel would do none of us any good. I felt I was endangering something very precious; but such warnings are so deucedly absurd in a man I would not listen to them, and now heaven only knows how dearly I may pay for it." Had he but known the full danger of that visit he would have been still more alarmed.

"Oh, Percy! is there nothing I can do for you?" Florence cried passionately. "I should so love to comfort you a little." And, for the first time she flung her arms about him. "Percy, Percy, tell me, how can I help you?"

"Only love me a little, my darling," he murmured gently, as he kissed the beautiful face, fairer in the moon-

light, with its look of despair and sympathy. "Love me, and it will help me bear my trouble bravely, no matter how terrible it may be."

Then for a time he forgot the morrow. Before they parted she had promised without condition to be his wife. But hating the thought that she might have deceived him, she told him gently how she had met some one else whom she believed it would be possible to love, but he did not belong to their world, so the danger was passed. And Percy, in his great content, forgave the shadowy man, who might have robbed him of this hour. And now, with no secret between them, they were both happy.

It is quite supposable that when a girl becomes engaged she feels much augmented interest in herself, which must be delightful, particularly as she acquires a staid respectability in the eyes of her friends. She loses that petty uncertainty which is believed to cling to every sister, until some grand, noble, generous man, considerately asks her to be his mate. It is not a great end to live for, but it is romance, it is sentiment, and for that let us be truly thankful. All of which Florence was not undergoing, as she has already almost forgotten her engagement.

The next morning Percy took an early departure. But much as she cared for him, she did not rise one-half hour sooner to bid him farewell.

Hers was a calm, cool, contemplative affection—by far the most comfortable kind.

She honestly imagined herself deeply in love. But love is really more enjoyable in the abstract; or it is less ideal in reality; and she felt not a little relieved to think the high tension of last night was not to be continued just at present.

"She was fond of Percy, and would be faithful." Poor little girl! She forgot that love born of pity, or disappointment, will not long stand the cruel strain of absence; the wear and tear of other interests.

In every community the few only are clever; the rest follow their lead, seldom rude or inquisitive enough to question "why?" So Percy dropped out of the circle, and the others, although none of their good parents were threatened with an early demise, felt it was time they too should leave; and they left.

CHAPTER XI.

PRECIPITATION.

To crawl is stupid laziness, if we are endowed with strength to do more. Walking—the blessing, the prerogative of man alone—is so ordinary that we have ceased to be grateful for the privilege; but leaping, under all circumstances, is exhilarating, even classical, in its association.

Let us leap.

CHAPTER XII.

CINTRA.

Away in Portugal, in the garden of one of those exquisite quintas, covered over with the clinging passion-vine, gorgeous fuchsias, and giant heliotropes (as we never see them here) peeping out from among the long-enduring cypress, and the gnarled and knotted cork tree—on the highway of Cintra, in this garden, were seated a man and a girl, forgetting for a moment all the beauty and splendor nature had placed around them; for we are sometimes so happy that we find ourselves ungrateful to the minor causes of our pleasure.

To Cintra, which is all a garden, with its hills, its mountains, its walls overgrown with the hydrangea, and its hedges of geraniums, which throw long shadows on the dusty roads, offering to the weary traveler a kind embrace; to Cintra, with its living works of a dead age, which Southey tells us "is the most blessed spot in the habitable globe", Lady Davenport had gone some months after her return from France. And in the garden of the cottage she had taken sat Florence and Clarence Thornberry.

But he was not Clarence Thornberry to her, but Father Drelincour, who in his clerical garb came every day to give her a certain lesson in the religious history of Spain; for she had come to Cintra to study, as well as enjoy its charming climate. But besides this, she was

learning another lesson; the many-times-told tale; he was trying to teach her to care.

The morning's task was over, but it was very lovely there, under the Moorish archway, with a little stream winding leisurely along at their feet, over its rocky bed. They remained long seated there, talking as friends talk when their friendship is old.

"But if there be no future," said Florence, who had been speaking of the sad fate of Inez de Castro, and the doubtful probability of her meeting Don Pedro in paradise, "if we are to be annihilated, why not have our chief object in life pleasure?"

"Because," answered Clarence, "thank God, there is a chance we may be saved, and the most degraded cling to that consoling hope. How many of us wickedly allow ourselves to presume upon divine forgiveness!"

"But what is wrong to one is not wrong to another," she continued. "How can one heaven do for all?"

"To God there is a comparative goodness" said Clarence, with an earnestness the world would have thought strange in him. "He weighs our sins according to our lights. Why do some women never err? Why are they always moral? Because they are never tempted. And many men are honorable, because they would gain nothing by being otherwise. And many of the souls we, in our conceit, imagine less pure than our own, will come forth fairer, less sullied with unpardoned evil, in that great day of judgment."

"But suppose we are to perish eternally when we pass out of this life; if the race is only immortal, not the individual," asked Florence, "then is life worth living?"

"I remember when I first heard that idea," sighed Clarence, "it stunned me; it seemed so probable. How could I have been so blind, I thought; I am of no conse-

quence. Why, the petals of that rose exist only to help make the rose; and the rose itself lives but a short hour, and it does only a trifle to beautify the summer; and that summer soon passes away, and is forgotten in those that follow. It is a scheme, and I am but the least mite toward its fulfillment. My life, which is all to me, is nothing in reality. As an individual soul, I do not exist. I merely occupy a little gap, which, if vacant, would not even be noticed. I am not as much as the petal, for it is good and beautiful; it fulfills its duty. And this is life. And for this the world was made, the heavens created, men cheated by useless aspirations. It is a heartless scheme, which is to benefit no one, and in which the many suffer. No, it is not so, I felt; it can not be so cruel. God sacrificed His Son, He lives, and loves us, and only a few are good and great enough to catch the faintest glimpse of His mercy. Then, my life ran on in peace, content with nature, satisfied there was some good in all mankind, and that, in time, if I might learn to understand the infinite kindness of my Creator I should not have lived in vain." He stopped. Never before had his faith been put in words; and they were now addressed to Florence; she understood him.

"I know the weariness you felt," she said, looking up at him; "the mental nausea you suffered. What am I? you ask. What is life? What is God? And the answer comes rushing through your brain: Nothing, nothing, nothing. Oh, it is horrible!"

"And still, during all our moral warfare," continued Clarence, looking earnestly at her, "we are very ordinary, very calm, very polite to our neighbors; no one knows of our skepticism; we are ashamed of it; but, alas! are we not more ashamed of our growing Christianity?"

"True," murmured Florence, sadly, "we are all cow-

ards; all afraid of the world's ridicule; and when I think of what miserable hypocrites we are to one another, there is a measureless comfort in feeling with God there is no use in trying to deceive."

Would they ever have talked so in London? Can we speak honestly of our most sacred feelings in the gassy atmosphere of the smoldering hangings of Society?

A few months of the quiet, uneventful Cintra life had brought these two very near together, particularly as Florence still considered Clarence a priest. It made him different from other men, throwing a sort of halo about him, which divided him from her world, separated him from its follies and temptations. Their friendship had grown more ideal than we usually find in this enlightened day. She was still unconscious, and he for the time forgot it was the old hackneyed malady, Love.

There is but one link gone, a few pages missing. One often likes to skip through a book and look ahead, and while they go in to luncheon, we must go back, and fasten the chain together.

* * * * * * * *

Lady Davenport returned to London, after her visit to France. She always found herself there at the end of every journey, whether she traveled in a circle or otherwise. She might imagine she wished to see Ethiopia, but, ten miles from London, that city would become her real destination, although she might travel back by the way of Africa. She bored herself for months in other countries, for the mere gratification of returning home; for she loved London, with its fogs and smoke, as a mother loves her child, even when its little hands are dirty; and to it she always came back for a mental recuperation.

Nothing remarkable happened. But nothing can hap-

pen now to surprise any one very much; we have given up trying.

One day, a horrible day outside, Florence was sitting in a pretty morning room in Lady Davenport's house in town, before a huge open fire. She had just put down a scrawl from Percy, which had arrived the night previous, and which she had not succeeded in deciphering.

"If he would only make a few copies of one of his best semi-weeklies, and send them at regular periods," she thought, "I should not be obliged to squander such a quantity of time over the particular love-wording of each individual epistle. I do wonder if my letters are as stupid?" she soliloquized, quite modestly. "Well, they are as short as possible—about the quarter of one of his—and I am a woman, too." And she pulled her chair nearer the fire, taking up her banjo, at which she diligently set to work.

Some time passed before Lady Davenport, returning from one of her many charitable visits, entered the room.

"Dear one," said Florence, not looking up, "do come here and help me, I can not get my banjo in tune. It is your beastly climate that does not suit it."

"I beg of you, do not disparage the climate; admit, rather, that it is the fault of the instrument; but even it I should like to try to tune." And Clarence Thornberry appeared above and behind Lady Davenport.

"My dear child," she exclaimed, "do not look so surprised. This is an old friend of mine, Father Drelincour, who tells me he met you in France. To be honest, I never saw him before in his priestly regimentals; but he is charming enough to even outweigh this obnoxious paraphernalia." After which prolonged introduction she went away to prepare for luncheon.

When she returned, Father Drelincour was playing a Spanish serenade on a well-tuned banjo.

"But if you only knew how ludicrous it was to see you, in your clerical apparel, playing that banjo," Florence was saying. "The incongruity is worthy an American."

"You remember," he replied, very low, "I have not always worn this raiment."

"Yes, I remember," and for some unknown reason she blushed.

Soon luncheon was announced.

"Florence," Lady Davenport said, across the table, smiling benignantly on them, "I have stumbled on a most delightful plan. Your father's birthday is not far off; what is it to be?" she asked, in apparently the most irrelevant manner.

Florence sighed. "I suppose a treatise on the Zoanthus Sociatus, its feelings and moral sensibility. You know," she said, turning to Clarence, "my father believes that our culture begins in the next world where it ends in this, and that our position in the future entirely depends upon the value of our brains. So you can understand," she added, in an apologetic manner, "how anxious I am to be able to converse intelligently with him there."

"Quite natural," replied Lady Davenport. "If one does not see much of their relatives in this world, they wish to in the next; and, as disagreeable people are not supposed to enter the kingdom of heaven, it may be rather a pleasant arrangement."

"Ah, I see," said Clarence, speaking to Florence; "you take up a new language, or write a pamphlet, or do something very intellectual for his birthday gift. Well, I think it a very charming and sensible way for a girl to please her father."

"But this is the most interesting part of my plan," interrupted Lady Davenport, never allowing herself to be long ignored. "I have just received a letter from your father, Florence; he has a new theory; he intends proving the Spaniards the oldest European nation. I do not know but he believes we all descended from the Spanish mackerel. However, he looks forward to discussing the subject with you in paradise, and requests you to write a treatise on the Spanish Church in Spanish. So I have decided to take a cottage in Cintra, as that would be rather a nice place for you to study up that topic, particularly as Father Drelincour happens to be going there, and might possibly be of some assistance to you." And, in every sense of the word, Lady Davenport went back to her mutton.

Florence could not have told whether she was pleased or not.

Looking at her, Clarence said, beseechingly, "Do be good and kind enough to say you are glad we are to be in Cintra together, even if it be the basest flattery."

"Father Drelincour," she answered, slowly, "forgive me; but at this moment I can not tell you whether I am more glad or sorry."

"Now," said Lady Davenport, suddenly rising, "Pere Drelincour, I am going to leave you to Florence's tender mercies, as I have a splitting headache, which I must rid myself of before six, as I dine out this evening. Au revoir," and she went away. So again they were alone.

Silently they returned to the morning-room. Florence went to the window, pulled aside the heavy hangings, lounged indolently on the broad low seat, amusing herself at the expense of the azaleas, which she pulled off, one by one. It was a beautiful picture, the girl half hidden there among the flowers.

"You are wondering why your tender mercies are to be wasted on so stupid a person as myself," Clarence asked, at length, standing before the great wood fire, his hands clasped behind him, watching her with a strange look of earnestness.

"No," she lazily answered; "I was wondering which was the best way to begin. How do women usually entertain you?"

"With their sins," he replied.

"Oh! of course; I forgot; you see them generally at confessional; and how much more interesting you must find a woman's faults than her virtues," she said, looking out of the window.

"It depends upon how good or how bad she may be," he replied, much amused at her assumed indifference.

"What a quantity of indigestible moral bonbons you must feast on," she said, jerking off two azaleas.

"Fewer than you imagine," he answered. "Women are usually wicked, if ever, in their youth; but they seldom realize it, or repent, until their old age; and it is more difficult to pardon the old than the young."

"They are only stale bonbons then, after all," said she, smiling at him.

"But we should not complain. What would be the result if we were all good? You remember what Bulwer says about every profession, however exalted, preying upon the sins and foibles of mankind, not his virtues."

"Yes, I have often thought of that," she said, much interested; "it is very deplorable, but every thing, in some way, depends upon the weakness of our neighbors. We are put in this world, and the majority live happy lives. Why are we not content with our surroundings just as they are? It is ridiculous to regret Eden, and Eve's inquisitive folly."

"Poor Eve! But if she had not erred, would beautiful cities have been reared? Would music have come into existence? Where would be the great schools of learning and of art? Would there be such pleasures as yachting? and London seasons? and traveling on the continent? I think Eve herself was the most severely punished for her luckless act, and after all, remember, it was a craving for learning, a fault which, even in this day, makes not a few of us most miserable," he stopped suddenly. "Pardon me," he said, going toward her, "I forgot these things could not amuse you. The position of a priest is so peculiar. What can I say to interest you? I am a man, and still I can never occupy an important place in the life of any woman."

"Really, your paradoxical condition never struck me before. It is very sad," and her voice was full of pity.

"I regret I opened your eyes; but believe me, I would leave off boring you now, if it were not raining so hard," and he too, comfortably arranged himself in the window seat.

"Do not apologize, then; you are merely the result of bad weather. Nature is the cause of our mutual affliction, let us growl at her," she said, carelessly.

"Indeed, I can do nothing but bless nature," he replied, bending toward her.

"You shall not surpass me in amiability; I will join you. You like this window and me," she added, "better than a wet walk, and I like your society better than my own. We both have good taste, that is all."

"You are too kind."

"Oh, no," she said, stifling an imaginary yawn; "any thing, any body is a godsend a day such as this. But," and she turned to him quickly, "a little while back you were abominably rude." It was no use; she could not

talk to this man as if she did not enjoy it, and she determined to take refuge in quarreling with him.

"And how? May I ask?"

"You calmly insinuated that the vows of celibacy are quite sufficient to render a man obnoxious to all women."

"Ah! you are quick to detect one's feelings," he said, much pleased.

"No, I am not. I only hate to be placed in the category of aspirants to marriage."

"It would not be wicked."

" No, but it would be lowering."

"Well, forgive me again," he said smiling. "We always judge the delightful many by the disagreeable few; and if a small number of women are foolish and frivolous enough to wish to marry, having the loudest voices, they give that reputation to all."

"I assure you, for your comfort," Florence replied, earnestly, "women, like men, admire any thing beyond their reach, and a man is much more agreeable when they know he can not marry them. The silly sentimentality of love is escaped, and the sincerity of friendship is there in its place. That is why we are generally so fond of our friends' husbands."

The burning logs on the hearth still burned; the rain outside still rained, and for awhile all was quiet. What was the use of these many words? They were not interested. Each was thinking of another time.

* * * * * *

"Why did I never see you again?" he asked, suddenly. "I waited a long time."

"We went away two days after," she answered very low. "I was glad. I had been disappointed."

They looked at each other; it was not strange to them that each knew to what the other referred.

"You were disappointed? you really cared? Thank you; I am so glad." He leaned toward her, waiting for her to say more; but she was silent. He took up her banjo, and played a low melody of smiles and tears.

When he had finished, he tenderly put down the instrument. "Tell me," he said, gazing at her wist-

fully, "why were you disappointed?"

"I was disappointed," she began firmly, "because—because"—her cheeks were burning with excitement—"because I was unhappy for—for Percy Garritson, who was obliged to return home." She commenced bravely; she ended with a little gasp.

"Ah—!" and Clarence rose and went to the fire.

"It is growing late," he said, coldly. "I shall leave you there among the flowers, and go out in the storm. Goodby, little one. Take care of your banjo, I shall hope to see you and it at Cintra."

The chain is complete. They met at Cintra.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE LESSON LEARNED.

Percy's father was dead, and he was now traveling in Germany with his mother. Their sad affliction had prevented his engagement with Florence being announced. And she herself had never referred to it as an established fact, even to Lady Davenport; it was not particularly amusing, why should she speak of it? She always, even from a little girl, had a horror of tiring her friends with her own private affairs.

Lady Davenport, therefore, ignorant of Florence's promise to Percy, felt no compunctions of conscience, when she assisted Clarence in his *poursuit amureuse*.

They had been two months at Cintra; and now the beginning of the end was very near. For a man and a girl, who had dreamed of each other after the first meeting, to be together, as they had been, for so long a time, without one word of love, is scarcely possible; but so it was, until this afternoon.

They had gone for a walk, and on their way stopped for the evening mail; and now they were sitting on the broken stairway leading to an old Moorish chateau, hidden almost by time and ivy.

"Why do men annoy one another with lengthy epistles?" sighed Clarence, tearing into bits his last infliction, "and why, when I am physically out of the world, should rumors reach me of Percy Garritson's

engagement? What interest have I in it? All men have to be sacrificed on the hymeneal altar sooner or later."

- "You know him?" asked Florence, hastily.
- "Yes."
- "And the woman he is engaged to?"
- " No."

Florence turned away. A night bird was hovering in the ivy just behind her.

Clarence lighted a cigar. It is not customary for a priest to smoke, but he was not a customary priest, and Florence was not well versed on the subject.

- "Are you acquainted with the fortunate young person?" he inquired lazily. He did not care very much to know.
 - "Yes."
 - " Well ?"
 - "He is to be pitied, poor fellow."
 - "And the girl?" he asked.
 - "She is to be even more pitied," she answered, huskily.
 - "Why?" It grew more interesting.
- "Why? Because she has made a mistake," replied Florence, passionately. "She can never, never be happy with him."
- "How is that? I know Percy very well; he is a charming fellow; I see no reason why he should not satisfy any woman. Tell me, little one, why do you predict unhappiness?"

She did not answer.

"The first time he attracted my attention," Clarence continued, "was on your account. Your two hands were held in his, like this," and he took her hands tenderly, "for full ten minutes, and you, I could have sworn, were happy, and I, who had not even met you then, was mortally jealous."

She hardly seemed to hear him, and never thought of

asking when he had seen her with Percy. She was looking far away, trying to realize her position; how to let Clarence know to whom Percy was engaged.

"Why should this girl not be happy?" he repeated.
"You were."

"Because she does not love him."

"And you did?" he exclaimed, dropping her hands.

"No, no," she groaned; "but I imagined I did. "Oh! Father Drelincour!" she cried, "I know this girl; I know just how she feels; give me your advice for her. What should she do? Make him miserable, by refusing to marry him, or destroy her own peace for the sake of his happiness?" She looked imploringly at him.

"He is too good a fellow for a woman to marry him out of pity," he answered, slowly. "Does she care for some one else?"

"No-! oh! no," she hastily replied; "no one else."

"Well, love is a strange thing. I know a man who adored a woman's picture for two years. He was very ill at the monastery I was in. He gave me his shrine to preserve in case he died. He valued it too highly to have it fall into ruthless hands. And that was love." Clarence was fond of soliloquizing. "And now I would kill the man who dared attempt to take it from me, were it the owner himself. And that, too, is love. And it is only for a woman's picture after all. Who can define the meaning of that term? To its door may be laid our greatest joys and our worst evils." He talked, apparently, to amuse himself.

"What was this man's name?" asked Florence. There is some terrible fascination in a question to whose answer one feels a previous disagreeable knowledge.

"His name was Clarence Thornberry, and I have taken a vow to do him the greatest kindness one can do another. Here is his treasure. Do you care to see it?" He took from an inner pocket an antique case of copper, heavily crusted with jewels—a relic, probably, that one of his fore-fathers had taken from the Saracens. Florence took it mechanically. She knew what she would find inside, and hesitated a moment before opening it.

"Clarence Thornberry never knew this girl," she said, at length, "and he lowered her by pretending to care, when he knew only that her face pleased him."

"You are unjust," he answered, indignantly, as he put out his hand for the picture. "Why do we love Raphael's Virgins? Because of a beautiful mouth? or a perfect nose? No, because the goodness, the purity of their souls, looks out and makes us reverent."

"Your logic is sublime in behalf of the virgins," she said, smiling bitterly, "but the picture there, in its gorgeous case, was not painted by Raphael. If he had been the artist, it might have been worthy a two years' adoration. As it is, pardon me, if I doubt the admiration being sincere."

"Clarence Thornberry did love you with his whole soul; you treated him with childishness, beneath the dignity of any woman; if he had died there in France, you would not have shed one tear."

"No, not one tear. I have little affection, and no superfluous tears, to waste on exceptionably handsome men; and I should not have imagined you would approve of so foolish a weakness."

"You are very cruel; a woman should not despise a man, because he admires her face," he said softly.

- " No, except when he calls it love."
- "Ah! will you ever know that?"
- "For him? Never!"
- "Oh! Florence! If I could but teach you!" he exclaimed.

"Father Drelincour!"

"And I will," he went on excitedly, drawing her toward him. Florence, you may not care yet; you may now be shocked; but the time will come when you shall know all, and forgive me. But your love I must have: in this whole world it is the only thing I value. Once I dreaded, feared Percy Garritson. But now you are all mine, mine. Tell me, my little one, can you ever love any other now? Do not call me Father Drelincour, that puts me far from you. I, too, have that obnoxious name; Florence, call me Clarence, and here alone in this beautiful world of our own, whisper that you love me; just once."

At last she knew why she was so happy, living quietly here in Cintra, and the discovery startled her for a moment. Then she looked up; he did not speak, but his eyes told her again, all the grandeur of his love, all his trust and faith in her.

"Have you nothing to say?" he cried, regretfully; "then good-by," and he turned to leave her. The sun went down. The light seemed to go out of her life.

"Clarence!" she called softly after him. "Clarence, I love you; and to-night I will write to Percy Garritson, and tell him, I can never be any man's wife."

* * * * * * *

"The Spanish treatise on the Spanish Church" was nearly finished. The delightful visit in Cintra was drawing to a close. The last month had been a dream, a perfect dream of happiness, which fate is good and kind enough to give to some of us. To know she was loved, was all Florence could desire. The prosaic idea of marriage never even encroached upon her bliss. She lived for the present moment; she forgot the future.

Clarence had indeed been greatly shocked to discover

her engagement, but as she had broken it immediately, he could not long be angry. It is not a difficult thing to be pleased when we are sure that there is a more unfortunate rival somewhere lamenting his ill luck. "And they had both been so young" he told himself. He felt sorry, very sorry, for Percy. "But Percy liked shooting and dancing. Sometime he would recover, and have the pleasure of falling in love again."

It was a lovely morning. They were in the little music room; the windows were thrown open, showing all the luxuriant beauty without. She was playing, caressing the piano keys, with her beautiful fingers, and he, leaning above her, was singing the last romanza in Favorita; it is so easy to sing when one loves. His voice echoed gladly through the rooms, making them ring with the passion of the music.

"I never understood before all its meaning," he murmured, "and if I had not met you, I should never have discovered it." He leaned forward to look in her eyes.

"Florence, are you sure you care?"

"Care!" and she turned suddenly to him, with a strange, wild expression in her face, he had never seen there before. "You know that I care; but how is it all to end?"

"Little one, it will never end," he said, smiling tenderly down on her.

"We are happy," she sighed, "only that we may be more miserable."

"No, Florence, we will always be happy now." He gently took her hand. "Trust, cherie, in my love; it is strong; it will protect you." Vain boast.

"Florence," called Lady Davenport, "your letter has come." "Your letter" meant Percy's. She took it; broke

the seal, and read it through, without the least appearance of emotion. Then handed it to Clarence, in a hard, dead way.

"Take it; our misery has begun; I felt it coming while you sang. Heaven forgive us!" She left him reading the letter.

"And you are false," it ran. "Great God! where am I to look for truth? when? how shall I regain my faith? I can not curse you, for I love you still; but I curse your wickedness, your treachery, which has stolen my religion from me.

"Fool! that I was, to believe in you. Yes, I have heard of your in Cintra, with you charming priest. But I would not lower you, or lower myself, or our love, by questioning you, in my letters. And my reward is—heaven knows what! While I trusted, you deceived. When they told me, how he, this holy man, was ever with you, walking and driving in the bright sunlight, and the soft tender moonlight, supping and dining, always at your cottage; singing to you in his grand, melodious voice; giving Spanish lessons to you, for the sake of propriety; you see, I know it all; when I heard this, I, idiot that I was, swore it was a lie. 'No,' I cried, she could not stoop so low. Would she let another make love to her, when she is all mine? Would she steal a man's heart from his church? Let an holy priest break his most sacred vows, his promises to God for her? No! no! Would she, if free, consent to marry a man wedded to his faith, his religion? Would she have him perjure his soul for her? No! Would she break her faith to me, for another?' Never! never! came the answer, she is more worthy. Florence, write and tell me it is all false. I will so gladly believe you, my darling. It can not be true. You are not false. Give me back my faith, my trust, my all. One little word, and the whole world dare not whisper a reproach.

"But, if it is true, then, farewell. My soul, my life, my future, is dead, cursed by you. In the vilest cities in Europe I will soon end my career. If you are false, then, there is no heaven to live and hope for." Here it ended.

Clarence, strong man as he was, staggered to the window. The dream was, indeed, broken. Why had his mad folly, his wild love, made him forget the horrible results which might follow his insane act.

He could not blame Florence; she did not realize the danger until it was too late. And alas! now it was too late, even to tell her the truth.

And Percy, poor boy! what he must have suffered!

It was a sad, useless concatenation of circumstances which had brought about all this wretchedness.

That night, Florence wrote two letters.

"Percy, you are cruel. I am not false; I am true; I swear it. So true I can not feel I love you enough to be your wife. This, and this only, have I learned from Father Drelincour. I bless you for refusing to believe vanity could make me stoop to steal a man's affection from his Church.

"Good-by; forgive me, for paining you. I, too, am miserable.

"But, Percy, my dear, dear friend, for your own sake, for the sake of your dead father, and living mother, believe still in God's goodness; and, now, again, farewell."

The other was to Clarence. She had not seen him since giving him Percy's letter.

"Good-by, forever," she wrote; "I understand now, how more than wicked I have been. Go back to France,

and your Church, before it is too late; your vows are still unbroken. I have been happy once; it is more than I deserve. God bless you, and good-by."

That same night, with Lady Davenport, Florence

started for England.

CHAPTER XIV.

A HALF HOUR IN A STUDIO.

It was June; every body was in town; the season was a particularly brilliant one, and Florence Andrews was more beautiful than ever. We are too civilized now, to die of broken hearts; it would be bad form, and we prefer suffering to being guilty of that heinous weakness.

She had, this year, the beauty of a woman; she was older, but she was grand; her loveliness was that which dazzles. No one called her now the little Andrews girl, and described her as piquant. Her humor had changed to wit; her piquancy, to stately dignity.

She had never seen Clarence again, although he had sought her many times, and in many ways. She was afraid of herself, her lack of courage to do right. But every week she received a bunch of yellow daisies; and for a few hours, out of the hundred and sixty-eight, was happy. She could not hate him for caring still for her. It was beyond her power to forbid it.

Percy was leading a wild, reckless, dissipated life; trying to bury his sorrow in excitement. But Florence had never met him since her return. And only now and then a stray bit of gossip was wafted to her, of his mad career. But he often wasted whole days to get a glimpse of her, as she went in or out of her home.

One day Lady Davenport persuaded her to go with her on a visit to the studio of one of her obscure protéges. And there she met Lord Thornberry. Was it fate? Was it chance?

"Are you happy?" he asked her, as she waited for Lady Davenport, who was purchasing whole portfolios of worthless trash.

"Happy!" she sighed, looking at him in a surprised, startled way, "are we ever happy long at a time?" Her voice grew firmer. "Whatever it may be, after a time the charm disappears; it burns itself away, and the ashes are left; or it evaporates, and leaves no trace behind. I still retain the ashes; would to heaven there was nothing!"

"Hush, little one, do not slander life and its pleasures so severely; you are too young;" his voice was very tender. "What have you done to regret so bitterly?" he asked.

"Every act of my life; and think," she continued hurriedly, "you, of all the people I know, and care for, you are the only one to whom I dare confess this, who would understand. I hate myself; I loathe my past; I dread my future. What have I done? waltzed a great deal, destroyed a man's faith in God, and broken his poor old mother's heart. A noble record; should I not be proud of it?"

"This is nothing but moral morbidness," he exclaimed; "little one, you are not so bad. I have known how you felt, and I have so longed to see and comfort you. You are cruel to me, and crueler to yourself. Why do you persist in believing you have wronged Percy Garritson? Your very friendship is enough to make a man keep his life pure and unstained for your sake."

"Stop!" she interrupted him. "Do not tempt me. I am not strong, I long so to believe what you say."

"Does your sorrow lower you? Do you think that I,

after caring for you, could do one act unworthy of that love?" He reverently raised her hand. "To me you are one of God's angels. I owe you love and devotion as one of His most beautiful works. Percy, poor boy! has fallen; the love which should have exalted, has consumed him, and made him desperate. And you sorrow for this?"

He held both her hands. "How long must I wait? Florence, will you never yield? Never, again, tell me whether you care if I live or die?"

"Is not my only joy in existence the knowledge that you, too, live?" she asked, wearily. "I care for you; yes, I have no strength to hide it. But what is the use of confessing it; it is harder to go back alone; I shall be more unhappy for having you again." She sank down in her chair.

"And if I were free, if the chain of Rome were loosened, I might have claimed that love?" he said, breathlessly.

For a moment she was silent; then, looking up, she slowly said, laying her hand in his, "Clarence, you know me as I am, a weak, a very sinful woman; do not test my love for you; do not think of me as the possible antagonist of your faith. I would not be the rival of your religion."

"You are, indeed, too noble," he exclaimed; "forgive me; sometime you will understand; and still, Florence, I am so selfish I would have a proof of your regard; dare I ask you to fulfill my very heart's desire? you care for me; but this much?" he almost groaned in his anxiety lest she should refuse this longed-for proof.

"Ask," she said softly, "for whatever lies in my power." They were alone. Lady Davenport and her artist had gone into the next room.

"Will you," he said, kneeling before her, "will you, for my sake, know my friend? for my sake be kind to him, let him plead his cause? Listen to his love, which is as deep as mine, and unfettered by any vows. Florence, Clarence Thornberry has loved you so long; and I have promised him, that some time, you will let him come, and in his own words tell you how faithful he has been. You think this strange; you do not understand. Florence, may I tell him he is forgiven?"

"Never, never," she cried passionately. "You of all men to advise me to listen to his love! And you pretended to care for me! Go, I do not wish to despise you."

Lady Davenport was coming back.

"Florence, you do not understand," he murmured, hoarsely.

"I do not wish to understand," she slowly replied.

"Alas! I was foolish enough to believe your love making was for yourself."

"It was so. Florence, let me explain," he entreated of her.

"That I fear would be too difficult. I shall be considerate."

"You are more to me than the whole world."

"So I trusted a few seconds ago;" and she sighed heavily, and rose to meet Lady Davenport; "a woman always discovers men false, sooner or later, and the happiest are they who can remain blind the longest; is it not so, Lady Davenport?" No one could have guessed the torture she was suffering. "And the most deplorable part," she went on bitterly, "is that a woman is never invulnerable, whatever her age, or her experience may be."

Lady Davenport laughed lightly, and wondered if Clarence had been flirting harder than usual. And the young artist thought he had never seen such glorious eyes, but was a trifle mystified at the wild agony of their expression, when the rest of that beautiful face smiled at him so calmly.

"And now," she quietly continued, walking slowly toward the door, "I think we have taken enough of Father Drelincour's valuable time, and as many of Monsieur Creux' charming pictures as we can possibly carry," which was not unkind, as the carriage was over loaded, and they left but three behind them.

That night Florence went to a ball, and there somebody told her that Percy Garritson had been thrown from his horse the day before. But, poor devil! he was so dreadfully wild, he might as well die now, as a few years later. It could affect no one but his mother, and the next heir.

* * * * * * * *

When she returned home, she found on her dressing table a bunch of yellow daisies, and a note. For a moment, she prayed for strength to send it back unopened with the flowers. But, alas! she was weak; she was a woman, and she read it.

"You are willfully unjust, believe me, for I swear it; you do not understand. If you yourself are true, if you wish to trust in me, then say I may present Clarence Thornberry to you as my dearest friend. This is a little thing, but if you care for me, you will consent. It is the first, the last request I will ever make of you."

That night she did not sleep. The following day, toward noon, Clarence received a note.

"It has taken me many hours to discover how much I care for you. You may bring your friend on Thursday at five."

He was happy. His work was done; her pride had yielded. She would be his beautiful countess within three months. To-morrow she would know all, and love him more for the battle she had lost.

CHAPTER XV.

REPARATION.

It was Thursday, but not yet five. A gloriously beautiful afternoon, a sort of gala day with the out-door world, when every flower rivaled its neighbor in the gorgeousness of its apparel, each, like those wily tempters of Proserpine, seeming more lovely than the last.

Society and her grand, majestic kinswoman, Nature—who, must, indeed, be wearied with this careless round of gayety, since she witnessed the folly of Eden—filled all London, and uncongenial as they appear, they wander hand in hand through every hour; the hollowness of the one, screened by the purity and redolence of the other.

The morning Florence had spent in a long ride out in the country, accompanied only by a groom. She rode too hard, too fast, and talked too little, to find many appreciative companions in her early equestrian tours.

And now, she was at home, in her best-loved study, a room as charming as herself, furnished by her father, with the treasures he had found in the old shops of Constantinople, or brought from the classic pawndealers of Italy; an epitome of to-day's triumph, resting on the fallen grandeur of a Past.

The professor's ambition was, to some time possess a private museum, where he might, in half an hour, travel

from the Archipelego to the Sea of Kara, with each accompanying delight. Meanwhile, the study was the store-house for the accumulating wealth.

It is not difficult to admire, respect, and even feel a deep affection for a father, who regards it a kindness if you place in your room, for safe keeping, an Italian sofa of the 16th century, an oak credence of the time of Francis I., a screen with Russian decorations, a walnut armoire, carved and ornamented with the ivory heads of Amazons; who closes your door with Gobelin tapestry, and places on your 19th century mantle Flemish pottery of the time of the beautiful Louise de Coligny, and the whitest faience from Rouen.

Here, in this world of her own, where so few were allowed to come, Florence was not lying on the four hundred years old sofa, but in a large, comfortable hammock, made only yesterday, giving herself up to that unqualified joy of doing nothing.

When we decide to do something, after a long struggle with ourselves, there is a certain unexplained pleasure in its anticipation. Whether we glory in our martyrdom, or plume ourselves on sweetly having conquered our prejudice, is not positively known. But it is certainly true, that when we have made up our minds to sacrifice ourselves, it would be regarded as a great waste of good nature were it found to be unnecessary.

So, Florence, as soon as she had dispatched her answer to Clarence, commenced to look forward to the interview, if not with pleasure, at least with interest. But it is a known fact that women love to martyrize themselves for the men they care for.

"I shall, of course, always dislike him," her soliloquy began, "but it will be rather amusing to tell him so, candidly, myself. Imagine his having the effrontery

to make love to me. It would be like Octavianus proposing to Cleopatra, or Marat offering to conduct the youthful Charlotte in to dinner." And she laughed, thinking how absurd the whole affair was. Her feelings since yesterday had undergone a complete change. "Yes, I shall always despise him; it is but a test of my affection; but, Clarence Drelincour, do not fear, I shall not be fond of your friend; ambition shall not tempt me to be unfaithful to your love. It is not so sad to live and die alone, if some one has once cared for you. Poor Abelard! poor Heloise! if they had but been patient." And she rested there a long time, almost weeping over the wretched fate of those two; that miserable union of great piety and great wickedness.

Finally, she left that stringed instrument of laziness; it was near three, and she went away to dress.

Thank heaven—and necessity—a woman, under almost any circumstances, can change her gown; and it is seldom that any thing but weak slovenliness or laborious profundity prevents her from feeling an interest in it.

Florence never hurried into her clothes. There was no unseemly haste in the way her garments were put on. She would read a page or two of Gibbon, while her faithful Abigail arranged her hair (she was on the fifth volume); think of the grave matters that had entered her head with her frivolous hairpins. It was the hour of looking over Punch, as well as changing her boots; she made it not a task, but a pleasure, to be completed in twenty minutes, or extended to three hours.

But to-day her toilet was soon ended. Gibbon had been uncongenial, Punch not brightened by Du Maurier.

She wore a long velvet gown bordered with black ostrich feathers, making her look like one of those sabled princesses of old, the brides of the frosty Vikings; up tight about her throat a narrow band of the dark feathers threw out the loveliness of her head most strikingly; and, falling over her wrists, the soft, yellow lace made her hands appear smaller and more delicate than ever.

The gods are not all dead; that deformed pigmy Besa, has outlived his brothers many a century. A man's heart is often conquered by the beauty of a woman's gown.

"Mademoiselle," said her woman, coming to her dressing-room just as she was pinning at her waist the bunch of daisies, arrived that morning. "Johnson has announced a lady to see you."

"Her name?" Florence asked, earnestly hoping she would not be obliged to see the visitor.

"She preferred not giving her name, so Johnson says, which he thought very remarkable, as she is a venerable dame." The woman's vocabulary was far above her station, which is much like having your shoes in a better condition than the road you travel.

"And has she ever been here before?" It was hard to yield.

"Never; but mademoiselle is quite safe in seeing the lady; her carriage has a coronet upon it." The visitor's reputation was established.

"Did she ask also for Lady Davenport?" Florence inquired, as a last hope.

"For you, only, and, besides, her ladyship is not at home."

"Very well, I shall have to see her; probably," she continued to herself, "some traveling charitable society; but I shall be firm; I will be in neither a 'bazar' nor a tableau."

Soon she left the room; looked into the study as she passed it for a last consoling glance; she intended bring-

ing Clarence up there. There among her books and pictures she hoped to prove to Lord Thornberry and Father Drelincour that her life was not all folly.

Down the stairs she went, her long skirts trailing behind her. She had reached the door. Why did she hesitate to enter?

Her woman had spoken rightly; the visitor was a venerable dame, crowned with that purified loveliness that sometimes comes with age. A beautifully majestic woman, who might have lived before the short waists of the Directory made the noblesse forget they were not all grisettes. Florence pushed the door open and entered. Her yellow daisies loosened, fell on the sill, and unconsciously she crushed them with her foot.

Her stately guest, dressed in the saddest black, rose as Florence came forward.

"My child, you are surprised at my visit?" she said, taking Florence's hand, "particularly as I did not send you my name; you think it very strange, but you will understand. You will pardon me, for I am Percy Garritson's mother."

Poor girl! A sickening weakness crept through every fiber. To be arraigned before a Spartan tribunal would have been less agonizing.

"And I, you know, am Florence Andrews," she answered, softly, tenderly pressing the hand she held. It was indeed a strange position in which to find herself. She felt it must be a dream.

Her visitor seated herself on a lounge, drawing Florence to her side; she watched her for a while with a scrutiny almost terrible in its earnestness.

"You wonder why I should trouble you with a visit? An old woman has no right to trespass on a young girl's time. No, no," she said hastily, as Florence would have interrupted her, "I am right; years ago, when I, too, was

a girl, I felt so many times. Try to forget I am old, dear child, for, indeed, I still remember my own youth; that will always keep my heart young. You have heard of my poor boy's accident?"

"Yes, for the first time, last night, I heard of it." Florence answered, very low, very softly. She dared hardly raise her eyes to this beautiful woman, whom she had so injured, whose heart was broken for her poor boy's suffering, which she alone had caused.

"And you still wonder why I have come to you?" Percy's mother asked of Florence, with a beseeching tenderness, as if she would crave forgiveness for this distressing visit.

"No, I do not wonder why you come to me," the girl passionately replied. "I only wonder why you are so kind; why you are so good as to touch my hand! Do not speak gently to me; I can not bear it. Do not ask me if I understand, and beg forgiveness for this visit. Curse me, rather, for you must feel that I deserve it."

"No, my child," Lady Garritson answered, bending over Florence, who had thrown herself on her knees, her head buried in her arms, "I do not curse you; I have no fault to find with you. I love my son, but I am his mother. I can not expect you to feel the same. I see his faults but forgive them. I can not help it, my affection makes me weak."

"And you do not blame me?" Florence exclaimed, looking up, hardly understanding what she had heard.

"No, I do not blame you. You have tried to do right, I believe. I have seen all your letters. Do not accuse me of willfully prying into your secrets, but Percy is all that is left to me, my only child. Florence, you are dear to him; for that reason you must be dear to me, You will not refuse my love?"

"Yes, I will refuse your love until I am worthy of it." She had risen and stood quietly before her visitor; her voice rang with a courage that thrilled the mother, "You have come to tell me I may yet make some reparation for all the misery I have caused. Whatever it be, I promise to thank you gratefully for that privilege."

"No, I do not ask you to make reparation, for you have done no wrong; but I have come to you to save my son." Again she took Florence's hand.

"If it be in my power, I am ready." Poor child! She never imagined what was coming.

"Is it true," asked Lady Garritson, "that you would marry Percy if you believed your love for him were great enough?"

"Yes."

"And there is no one else you hope to marry?"

" No."

"Forgive me for questioning you so rudely, but my boy is dying." It would be difficult to say which of these two women suffered more intensely.

"You could do nothing I would not forgive," she answered, softly.

"Oh, my child! you are indeed worthy of a better man than he. Your goodness tempts me on, makes me more willing to confess the object of my visit. I have come here to beg on my knees that you will marry Percy, and be his friend. I understand you do not feel for him that love a woman owes her husband; but, then, you care for no one else. Child! I know the terrible request I am making of you. I do not ask it, as an injured parent, whose son's life has been ruined by love of you. I do not ask this sacrifice because I have the right; but because I see you are a noble woman, and I am his mother." She paused; but Florence made no answer.

"If you consent," she went on slowly, "and he dies, your martyrdom will be short, and he will have been happy for a little while. If he lives, you will have saved both his life and his soul. Florence, if you cared for another, I should not have thought of this; but as it is——"

"You shall know the truth," she interrupted, gently, firmly resolved to spare herself no pain, "you shall decide his fate. I am fond of Percy, but not in the way his wife should care for him. When we were engaged I did not realize how different that love should be. But, in France, I met some one who taught me what I thought I already knew. This was a priest;" her voice sank unconsciously lower. "I can never marry him; will never, if you wish it, see him again. You shall decide; the right is yours. I would gladly have been his wife; God willed it differently. I only tell you this because I feel that you should know the truth. If by sacrificing myself, I can give you back your son, the past may yet be redeemed. My life is at your disposal; it is not worth much; but I am quite willing to follow your bidding, whatever it may be."

Lady Garritson tenderly took her in her arms. "My child, I am a woman, I understand every thing you have told me; and from my heart I thank you for your confidences. But I am weak; I have not the strength to refuse your sacrifice. There is but one thing more——"

"That is, I should go with you now, at once. Very well; I shall soon be ready. Excuse me for one moment." She did not hear the reply. She hurried from the room; beyond the door she staggered—almost fell. She dared not think. Lady Davenport had not returned. There was no one to speak to—no one to whom she could say, "good-by".

She went to her "study", the room where a short time before she had been so happy, where she had dreamed of Clarence, where she had found the last bunch of yellow daisies that morning; she looked, they had fallen from her belt. "They, too, have deserted me," she thought. "Good-by," she cried, "good-by!" It was her last farewell to all her former life.

She went to her escritoire. Clarence would be here in one hour; she must leave him some word. She wrote hurriedly for some time; it was not satisfactory, but she had no time to write again. Going to an old credence, she tenderly took out her rings—her only wealth. They were strung on a yellow ribbon, that had once tied a bunch of daisies. She looked at them sorrowfully; each had a history. She slipped from her fingers those that she wore at that moment.

"He shall have them all," she said, "all but the intaglio with the letter, and the little one he gave me in Cintra—I can not, oh! I can not give up that. And it is worth so little, it can not be wrong to keep it."

She rang for her woman. "Walton," she said, "I am going out. Father Drelincour and another gentleman will call at five. Tell him—be sure and see him yourself—that I said there was a small package and a note in the study for him, and would he go there and get it; take him yourself. I do not know how long he may remain, but that is of no consequence. Do not let him be disturbed; he may wish to write an answer."

The woman looked surprised. Florence was not usually so explicit. "And Walton, tell Lady Davenport that I have gone to a wedding, but not to be worried, as Lady Garritson was kind enough to take care of me. Perhaps she will understand."

"But, mademoiselle!" Walton exclaimed, "you are not going to a wedding all in black?"

"Yes, I am; the wedding is to be very quiet, the man is very ill—dying, perhaps; Walton, you may tell Lady Davenport that, also. Good-by, I may not return to-night." She went a few steps; then stopped. "Walton," she said, a beautiful blush suffusing her face, so pale and sad. "I have dropped my flowers somewhere, look for them, and be sure to put them in water."

Then she went down-stairs. Lady Garritson was quite happy, for she had only waited twenty minutes for Florence to snap an hundred links that bound her to the past.

CHAPTER XVI.

"THE IRONY OF FATE."

THE play had been played. The masquerade was over. And Clarence Thornberry need never again array himself in those sad habiliments, the only substantial remains of Father Drelincour.

Such a lovely day as it was! and his heart was filled with that blissful content which comes when our dearest hopes are realized.

It was the first time his beautiful horses, so well known in London, had ever taken him to Lady Davenport's; for now he went in his own character, went as the world knew him, the most brilliant, worldly member of a brilliant, worldly world.

But they had not seen him much of late, and driving through the crowded avenues, it almost appalled him the number of people he saluted. "And do I know the names of all these individuals?" he thought, "do they care no more for me than I for them? How selfish we all are! Can I ever thank my good fortune sufficiently for allowing my little scheme to work so admirably. To think of all these people, not one has ever met me in my clerical robes; it seems hardly possible. For a whole year I have been perfectly happy; yes, happy enough to last an ordinarily greedy man a lifetime. Ah! the escapes my disguise must have been blessed with; how often have I been just not discovered. Well, I trust my

sublime success will make me a better man. Oh, Florence! Florence! what would my life be now without you? A blank—a long, empty span of years." Then some one else bowed. "I believe I really prefer being old Drelincour; one is in no way so interesting, and one gets on so much more rapidly. What snobs we all are. My beautiful steeds, they are welcoming you, not your driver, to-day." Bowing to the most charming of women, in the most charming of bonnets, did not reconcile him to the least delay.

But, although Lord Thornberry knew a great number of people very well, few knew him equally so. No one presumed to even expect more from him than a passing bow; for his pet theory was to know the world in crowds. A single individual can rarely be indebted to a crowd, but it is a trifling matter to put a crowd under obligations to an individual. And so he stood with regard to society.

He was like, what famous man is it? who said that the death of one or two friends would have killed him, while a multitude of acquaintances might perish without spoiling his appetite for supper. He would have been a philosopher, had his philosophy not taught him, that, like many other things, it would prove an ungrateful vocation.

Walton perfectly followed out Florence's last instructions, although rather surprised Father Drelincour had come alone and without his priestly garb.

Clarence was told by the faithful woman, that Miss Andrews had gone out, but had left a package and a note for him in the study. Her absence was a great disappointment, but somewhat softened by his being admitted to the study, that sanctum of sanctums, where he soon found himself. "I shall wait until she returns,"

he had said, "or leave an answer to her note;" and the woman had gone away; and he was alone.

It was a very lovely place, in which to dream of love and his happy future; he seemed in no haste to open the note, probably an apology for Florence's absence; she would be here, surely, in a few moments. So he lounged around the room, touching tenderly all her treasures; she seemed so near—her pen was still damp with the ink she had been using.

A withered bunch of daisies nestled at the feet of a bronze satyr, who looked as if he would guard them jealously.

The soft rose light tinged every object with a tender warmth; and the logs sputtered energetically away on the hearth, while the songs of birds came through the open windows, making the most delightful medley of opposite seasons.

And he was happy. How pure and noble were her tastes, how eloquently those dumb objects spoke of her, suggesting her dear presence near at hand! This glimpse of her real home, appealed to every fiber of his being, and she would soon be here, and then—he scarcely dare think of the then, after that happy moment.

Meanwhile, he would read her note; could it be Lady Davenport, or her training school, that delayed her return?

He took up the letter with almost a caress; pulled the envelope gently off; quietly unfolded the sheet of paper, and slowly bringing his mind back from a half finished picture on the easel, he began to read:

"Clarence, do not try to understand; I can not; I had hoped for something else; God knows it was not that you would be unfaithful to your vows.

"Yesterday I suffered much. Oh! why did you wish

I could have been happy—content? I do not call you cruel. What am I writing you? I scarcely know. I feel I am going mad.

"Clarence, I am never, never to be happy again. I am on my way to purgatory, only no one will call it that.

"I am going to expiate my sins in this world, in the exalted position of Countess Elzevir. I shall be Percy Garritson's wife when you read this; and half the world will envy me. But you—you will understand. I need not tell you it is pity, remorse, not ambition—for my ambition was to learn to love your religion, and like you, consecrate my life to God. But my path leads, alas! not to the peace, the quiet of a convent.

"These are the last moments I breathe the free air of an unfettered existence. Am I a coward to wish I might die right here, at this moment? Good-by, life! goodby, hope! good-by, freedom! good-by, all, all but duty.

"Dear friend, far away in your sacred home, pray for me, that I may be faithful in every thought to my husband.

"Clarence, tell me truly, did I, for a few hours in Cintra, steal away your heart from your church? I am a woman, and it is so pleasant to know that one is loved. If this be so, I wish to make a trifling payment for those happy days. I send you my string of rings. Dear old ings! they are all I have, but they may be worth enough to procure a few masses for my tired soul.

"Farewell, farewell! Soon you will be here reading this just where I write. Oh! Heaven, why have you decreed so cruelly that I must go away forever? Leave behind me all that I love? I have not shed one tear, but I feel them dropping one by one, on my dead heart, each with

a sad, tender echo of our past. Clarence, for the sake of the duty laid out before me, I trust I shall never, never see you again. Pity me, and be kind."

"Great Heavens! what did it mean?"

It meant that his "sublime success" had turned to a satanic irony. A mocking devil sat there beside the bronze satyr, in the red light, laughing loudly at his shattered dream, and the withered daisies.

It meant that he must go home alone. There was no answer.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE COUNTESS ELZEVIR.

Is it true that time will stupefy any suffering, whatever it may be? as the old Scots believed the tortures of hell would pall were they not intensified hour by hour. It may be so. Who knows the sorrows of his neighbor? How can we be sufficiently grateful to our Creator for endowing us with that subtle ability for concealment, by which the vain regrets, the hopeless aspirations, the wretched retrospections, are smothered, huddled away out of sight of the curious world; which enables us to laugh most loudly at our own heartbreaks!

Our hearts to-day are but physiological starting points; a necessary organ, a little more sensitive, perhaps, than our lungs. Common sense is the knight-errant that guards its softer tendencies. Sometimes, in an unexpected struggle, that stalwart protector is overthrown; sometimes, he voluntarily falls asleep; then, unless it meets with requited affection, that vital center will have a very hard time of it. Time, like the invaluable stratina, may do great wonders toward healing it; it may last for years, but it will be less precious and more delicate for its nicks and cracks.

More than a year had passed since Florence had been Countess Elzevir; and if she still suffered, God helped her to hide it. They had been living in the south of France for many months, and Percy now believed himself perfectly recovered.

They were happy; yes, happy, both of them. It was a strange chain of circumstances that had developed into the perfect content that was now theirs.

They had been married immediately, and from that moment Florence had never left her husband. He was greatly changed, much older; the life he had led seemed to have left him unsullied; he squandered away his health, but he exhaled all the evil of his nature. He had hated every hour, every pleasure of that fearful season; but it was gone, the misery left behind. And they were friends. Every detail in Florence's short romance he knew, she had told him all, and for her sake the name of Drelincour was a sacred memory, that lay buried beneath their present happiness.

She had never heard one word of Clarence. Lady Davenport alone understood how terrible had been their mistake, and many were the sad tears she shed in secret, over the wretched denoument of her cherished hopes; as for speaking his name to Florence, that she never dared.

He had received her letter, the poor child knew from Walton; that was all. He had followed her bidding, and never tried to see her. She always pictured him far away in his French home, in the beautiful chapel, praying for the peace which had come at last to her.

Her love slumbered; she believed she had ceased to care.

But it must not be imagined that peace had come at once; the struggle to crush that powerful cry of her heart had been a weary labor of days and weeks. Sometimes hours would go by, and she would imagine herself

content. "It is all over," she would think, "at length I am at rest."

Then, in the dark hours of the night, she would dream of Cintra, and all that happened there, and when she awoke and found it but a memory, her whole soul sent up a wail of regret, of utter helplessness, "hungry and lonely and sharp," and she would weep for very pity of her own misery, in those dark, horrible moments of agony.

But now, for a time, her pain was lulled to sleep, exhausted from its sheer intensity. Perhaps, there is an exquisite martyrdom in having reached the depths of human suffering; but then, who knows, for certainty, when they have reached that depth?

Now they had come home; how much that meant to both! The weary journey after health and peace was ended, and they had returned to lead an ideal life, up in the old castle in the North, where the ivy shut in with jealous care a little world of their own.

The old Countess Elzevir, Lady Garritson as she liked better to be called, could rest content only when she was near her dearest child, meaning Florence, whom she regarded as Percy's mental, physical, and moral salvation, and she was repaid by a sweet, tender devotion from the young girl, with which old age so loves to be caressed.

And to the tenantry who lived on the lands of this long neglected northern home, Florence's coming seemed the advent of an angel, after the reign of a not unusually brutal overseer.

One morning Percy came to her in the old French garden. He always approached her now with a tender deference, as if he felt his own unworthiness; to her it was the sweetest pleasure life held, when she could win

him from himself, making him forget that sad, dreary winter, when he had wasted his life mourning for her, dazzling him sometimes with the wealth of love she believed *now* entirely his.

"Percy, I am so glad you are here," she exclaimed, going to meet him, as he came quickly down the path. Her hands were filled with bright, gorgeous blossoms. Had "Maud" been in her garden, even in the dewy sunlit morning, she could not have been more lovely than Florence as she stood there, with flowers at the right of her, flowers at the left of her, flowers all round her. "These roses are always pretty," she said, with a radiant smile, "but they are beautiful when you are looking at them, too."

He stooped down and kissed the hands filled with roses. "They are not even pretty to me, when you are not by," he said sadly, but returning her smile. "I can enjoy nothing unless you are with me, Florence; every thing is hideous when I am alone; and now I am going to beg another favor, my countess, something I expect you to refuse."

"Then, I shall disappoint you," she answered, "for I am trying to be as amiable and as inane as possible."

"Florence!" he exclaimed, "if I did not adore you, I should hate you. Why are you so good to me? This is another debt of gratitude I owe you."

"You must not talk so," she said, slipping away from him to pick up a flower she had dropped. "O, look at this lovely, dead butterfly!" she cried, holding up a yellow, gauzy thing; but he did not look at the butterfly, he only looked at her.

"The favor?" she asked, presently, "what is it?"

He was leaning against an old broken bit of statuary. "Clarence Thornberry has returned from Japan," he

said slowly, "and, Florence, I would like very much to have him visit us; you know I have always had a great admiration for him."

"Well?" she turned away, so that he should not see her face.

"Well?" he echoed.

"Why not have him?" she asked, at length.

"But I know you have always disliked him."

"No, Percy," she replied, earnestly, "I only thought I should dislike him, if we ever met. You remember," she went on slowly, "I told you I expected to meet him that day. Percy, those old, foolish, wretched days are over, we only have one another, so let your friends be mine."

"Thank you, dear one," he said tenderly. "I was so anxious to know this man better; he was a great friend of my brother's. He is so grand, so noble. Promise me you will like Clarence Thornberry when he comes."

"That I am sure will be very difficult, but send for him, and I will try to be as kind as possible, because he is your friend;" she looked lovingly up at him.

"Oh! my precious one! God was very good to give you to me," he murmured, softly.

"God was good to teach me before it was too late how wicked I had been. Percy!" she cried passionately. "Percy, my husband! tell me here, here in the bright sunlight, with God looking into both of our hearts, that thus far I have been a good wife to you."

"My dear little girl!" he whispered—all the flowers lay scattered at their feet, his arms held her fast—"before all the angels, I swear my wife is the best wife in the world; that she is my life, my soul, without her—great heavens! I can not think of life without you, Florence. God would not be so cruel as to take you from me."

"And, Percy, no matter what comes," she said, leaning back so as to look straight in his eyes, "you will always believe I try to be good and true to you, whatever I may be to others?"

"Dearest, I love you; and no power on earth could make me doubt your truth. I might doubt my own, but yours—never. But, ma petite, why are we talking such nonsense?" and he looked down on her, laughingly.

"I do not know," she answered, slowly; "only when you spoke of Lord Thornberry coming, I felt I would like to hear you say once more, that I, all by myself, had made you happy."

"My darling, I shall never be able to tell you how happy," he softly said, "only I know how miserable I was without you."

Then they walked slowly back to the castle.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"O, call back Yesterday! bid time return!"

KING RICHARD.

The third. The third was supposed to mean that a few more guests were to be lodged at Elsinore; that was all. But, alas! it also meant that, in a cottage, not half a mile off, a poor little child was going to be called away from this cold, unfeeling world, leaving a broken-hearted mother, who was foolish enough to mourn the loss of so small a thing.

The young Countess Elzevir, knowing how ill the child was, chose to neglect her duties as hostess, and spend the afternoon with the weary woman whose passionate love had not been sufficient to hold the life of her little one.

Half-past three—the struggle was over; the dreary world was drearier to another heart. Florence had made it a little less lonesome, a trifle less miserable; that was all that lay in her power to do for that desolate mother.

She was standing at the window keeping watch, while the poor, tired creature rested a moment, now that her task was done.

"It seems wicked," Florence thought, "to be as happy and content as I am when there is so much sorrow in the world. What have I done more than this woman that I am so blest?" A clatter of horses' feet; she looked up.

Her husband, probably, driving some one home from the station.

What a pretty cart it was! How the chains clanked! Yes, there was Percy, dear, good Percy, whom she had grown so fond of, and beside him was seated—Father Drelincour—

No, no, it could not be. It was Clarence Thornberry—it must be he!

"Oh, heaven !-"

Then she sank down senseless for a moment; for in that one second of awful perplexity, the mystery of the past was rolled away. She understood it all.

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Where was her boasted happiness? Her hard-earned peace? Gone, gone, gone! Oh, agony! What could she do? Must she go home? Must she see him? Bid him welcome? Look up in his eyes and smile? Put her hand in his? And all the time be true in every thought to her husband?

"Great God, give me strength," she cried. "Cruel, cruel, that he should have come! God make him to have forgotten; make him no longer care—"

The carriage came for her. She sent it back. She must walk. She must have time. She must think.

"I remember being here years ago, but somehow the place looks differently to me now." Lord Thornberry said this while he and Percy were waiting for dinner and the others to appear.

"And it is different," exclaimed Percy; "wait until you see her, my beautiful wife. Thornberry, by Jove! I did not know it was allowed for mortal man to be so happy."

Clarence said nothing; he did not even smile.

Why he had accepted Percy's invitation he did not know. The months he had been in Japan had not changed him; they had only intensified every good and evil quality he possessed.

He had not come here to gratify a morbid curiosity, as some might imagine; his feelings for Florence were too sacred for that. It was not that he hoped she still cared for him; he would sorely regret having caused Percy one little pang of jealousy.

He had come simply because it was beyond his power to stay away.

And there, apparently so calm, he waited in the hall-way, gazing sternly into the open fire as he unconsciously stroked the head of a great mastiff. He waited quietly, but a fierce excitement racked his very soul.

Every second seemed to him an eternity. Would she never, never come? This suspense was the most maddening torture; he longed to see her, still he dreaded it.

What would she do? It would be impossible to hide her surprise. He rose from his chair, pushed the dog from him. He must first see her alone; but where? and how?

"I believe I left my handkerchief in my room," he exclaimed, suddenly. "How stupid! Pardon me, a moment, Percy, while I run after it." What a foolish, paltry excuse, he thought; "but I might meet her on the stairs, in the corridor, somewhere." And he did.

She was leaning against the long Gothic window, on the first turning of the grand old stairway, looking out on the green, dreamy valley below, with its misty streams still catching and holding for a moment longer the light of the setting sun.

Did she know he was there? was she, too, afraid? he thought, and his heart leaped with a wicked joy. But

she seemed perfectly unconscious of his presence. How beautiful she was! Never had he loved her more ardently. But—she was Percy Garritson's wife; and for a moment some good angel tempted him to turn back, to go away, and leave her in peace, standing calmly there by the half-opened window.

"Florence," he murmured, it was so low, hardly more than a name breathed in a sigh.

"Ah! I did not hear your step," she said, turning to him quietly; "pardon me for being such a wretched hostess. You are Lord Thornberry, I am sure!" she gave him her hand, looking earnestly at him the while. "Lord Thornberry, I am very glad that I have seen you alone for the first time. I want to apologize for having always disliked you. I believe I was a little prejudiced," she smiled at him, thinking he would make some reply. But he was silent; he could find no words to answer her.

"But now as you are my husband's friend," she continued, "I am going to be very fond of you; I trust you will like me in return."

He said no words, but knelt down, and kissed the hem of her gown. To him she was no longer a woman. She was a saint.

"Come," she said, gently leading the way. "Percy will be so happy to see us friends at last."

He looked at her wonderingly. How could she be so calm? Not a nerve had seemed to quiver, not a word faltered, while he could not utter a syllable.

Had she not recognized him? and a quick pain rent his heart. Not even remembered! Oh! the torturing agony of that thought!

All through dinner he watched her, marveling more and more. She was so calm, so grand, so beautiful; true

she ate nothing, not even her favorite aspic de foie gras; but she kept up a brilliant, clever conversation with a young dramatist, who sat beside her. They were all bright, interesting people, but as of old, she guided their talk, and the young author won three mighty friends, and innumerable good dinners, by being so skillfully brought out.

Every moment Clarence suffered more. "My love, my love," his heart cried out, "you have not forgotten, you could never be so cruel!" Still, the doubt grew, though fiercely he fought with it; slowly it turned into a certainty, for she did not even avoid him; but rather sought him out.

Later in the evening, he came and seated himself by her. He felt he would go mad, did he not discover how she regarded him. Was it possible this sweet serenity, this evident indifference, was but assumed? Still, it seemed more improbable that she had failed to recognize him. Which was it? He must know.

And she, following every thought, every doubt, longed to tell him the truth. Only to whisper, "I remember all, I, too, am miserable." But no, that could not be. Now, at this very moment, she must strengthen every suspicion, make him believe she was as frivolous, as heartless, as the world had once thoughtlessly called her.

"Lord Thornberry, you are not at all as I expected to find you," she said calmly, as he bent over her, with a look so intense, she felt her very soul laid bare, a gaze so mournful, so beseeching, that she turned white with fear, doubting her strength to meet and return it as her future peace demanded.

"Your personal appearance I mean," she continued bravely; "you resemble an old friend of mine, Father Drelincour."

"A dear friend, I trust," he answered hoarsely, a sudden joy transfiguring his whole being.

"Very dear," she lightly replied, looking toward Percy. "I owe him my knowledge of the Spanish romances; and his friendship taught me," she went on more earnestly, "to understand, and appreciate my husband," She looked up at him, a heavenly light shining in her eyes, seeming to veil from her the passionate agony of the man standing there before her.

It was worse than to have been forgotten. She had indeed grown indifferent, since she no longer guarded that sacred friendship, since she could speak of it so carelessly.

But when she bade him good-night, the unconscious appeal for forgiveness her eyes besought, made him almost guess the truth.

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A week passed, and Clarence still wondered. He so wished, so longed, that she might recognize him, that he could not banish all hope; a lingering spark now and then cheered his miserable gloom. One moment he was convinced she knew him, remembered every hour in Cintra, felt the same toward him, as when they together walked in the lovely old Spanish garden; the next instant, he laughed at his conceit. Care for him! he was less to her than the meanest beggar that knocked at her door, for she could give him nothing.

Often he was cruel, cruel, without meaning to be, in his vain attempt to discover how she felt.

And this week to her was the most terrible of her life. Never before had she known the need of deceiving herself; but now, she dared not think, dared not reason with her own heart. "It is the surprise, the shock; I am acting like a silly school girl," she would sternly tell

herself many times during the day. "I love Percy, of course—he is my husband. Father Drelincour is dead; I never could have truly cared for him. It is Percy whom I have always loved." And this she would repeat again, to convince herself that it was true, trying like a child to learn a hard lesson.

To meet him in the early morning; in the lazy noon; in the dusky eve; to meet him unexpectedly twenty times a day; to have him help her gather flowers; to serve him tea; to hear him sing those songs she had known so well in Cintra; to ride every day alone with him and Percy; to walk under the old forest trees; and still never betray her secret! It was terrible! But fearful a strain as it was on her self-control, there was an exquisite joy mingled with the pain of having him near her. Poor child! vainly she tried to persuade her heart these thrills of happiness came from her love for Percy.

And then she would be seized with that miserable dread, lest she had done wrong—the saddest, most disheartening of all doubts, when one has tried hard to be true. Was she right in thus deceiving Percy? Should she have told him who Clarence was? But he had not been well of late; and he enjoyed Lord Thornberry's friendship so much, that Florence could not bring herself to rob him of it. So, buckling on the stoutest armor, she resolved to suffer the cruelest martyrdom rather than deprive Percy of one hour's pleasure.

The weeks went by, and each day the task was growing more difficult, for Percy, after a month's gayety, determined to invite no more friends to visit the charming home, but to more truly enjoy himself alone with his wife and Clarence, whom he was constantly urging to remain; thus he was testing Florence's loyalty to a degree he never could have imagined.

With the old countess, the three lived together in the closest intimacy, entirely dependent on each other for amusement. Had Florence never known Thornberry before, it would have been hard to remain indifferent, they were, in every thing, so perfectly sympathetic. But with all their past binding them together, it was a life full of peril, full of danger.

Early one morning Florence arose. (After four days of rain a sunrise is a very beautiful sight.) It was early, very early, when she stole down stairs, and out of the house, like a truant child.

Walking along the cliffs, battling with the wind, that had not yet been lulled to rest after its glorious rampage of so many hours; watching the angry waves dash on the stubborn rocks; seeing the great red sun light up the world; her enjoyment was perfect. For the moment she passed out of herself, forgetting her doubts and fears; she soared beyond the mundane; not realizing she was only a mortal, intensely happy at being so completely alone with Nature. It was a moment when her soul thanked God for having lived, and prayed to be submissive to His will.

But some malignant spirit had ordained that never should this exalted frame of mind take possession of her, that Clarence should not be there to share it.

He, too, had wakened early, and drawn by a restless longing for he knew not what, a sympathy with Nature in her turbulent mood, he had gone out on the cliffs, and there they met.

They would have been more than mortal, had they not enjoyed that hour alone by themselves; the water struggling against the stones, as they were struggling with their hearts. And still, one would have thought they were strangers, seeing them there, so little did they talk; for what could they say? what subject had not been spoken of in the old Spanish garden?

"I am so glad I was not Marie Antoinette!" Florence exclaimed, suddenly. "Think how fearful it would be to have a whole nation know that you had risen to see the sun rise, and censure you for it."

"Poor Marie Antoinette! and still her misery has made her famous," he murmured; "she would have been forgotten but for that." They were only words to make her speak again.

"If fame means pity, it is galling, not sweet," she said, hurriedly. "Would Marie Antoinette have given one hour's happiness for a letter of condolence from every man in Europe?"

"Of course not," he replied, "and still it was her pride that was most cruelly hurt. She believed so fully in the divine right of kings. She had no moral sufferings. There are martyrs more to be pitted, whose names we do not even know!"

"Yes," she answered, slowly, "the depth of human misery is not reached until the heart besieges the soul, when, following the dictates of the one, we must crush the conscience of the other."

"What!" he asked, bitterly, "do you mean when a woman's judgment, her honor, all her higher mental qualities form a tribunal to arraign the weaker tendencies of her love; and when they are mercilessly slaughtered, she calmly unfurls a banner of peace and submission?"

"Thank you, Lord Thornberry, for so generously understanding me," she said, coldly; "but, as for poor Marie Antoinette, the crowd reviled her, and it is not half as sad for a whole people, to whom you are indifferent, to misunderstand you, as one individual, whom you have cared for. But we all know it is easier for those

we love to hurt us than those we hate." Her words followed each other undecidedly; one could almost believe that fierce, bitter tears were not far off.

"Ah! little one," he thought, "you still have a heart," and again he felt that wicked joy.

"For, have you not noticed," she continued, gravely, turning toward the castle, "how sensitive a mother is regarding the affection of her children, when she may be careless to the indifference of all the rest of the world?" Then the doubt returned—this was simply a train of reasoning.

Very quiet this life seemed to the world outside, classic almost in its simplicity. To Florence and Thornberry every moment was redolent with the irony of what life might have held, had it not been for the foolish prejudice of a girl, and the mad caprice of a man.

And still Clarence lingered, knowing Percy liked his being there. As for Florence, he did not believe she cared; to discover whether she knew him had become the desire of his life; and he could no more refrain from putting her to every test, than a zoologist can resist torturing the delicate animal creation that comes within his power.

After riding, Percy, weary, perhaps, with the exertion, would beg Clarence to read to them in Florence's little boudoir, which was his favorite smoking-room; and Thornberry, in a wild desperation, a hopeless hope for something he could not explain, would read the soft, tender words of Meredith, or the older, more passionate love of Dante; and Percy, lying on the lounge, would fall asleep. But Clarence still read on to her alone, making that little room, all red and gold, echo with the wooing of other hearts; in those moments of the most poignant regrets, the bitterest torture, the most fearful

temptation, what joy one little reference to their past would have been! One word of tenderness would have fallen as the precious dew upon their wasted lives.

But no, it could not be; sitting there in the firelight they were privileged only to bewail the heartbreaks of others; but even that was easier than to talk, so on and on he read, and each, sighing over these imaginary woes, wondered at the other

CHAPTER XIX.

PARAGRAPHS.

THERE is little more to tell; and that shall be told in paragraphs.

Now for a short time, a most healthful reaction set in; brought about by the arrival of Lady Davenport, who allowed no one to be melancholy, but herself. There were no more quiet half hours, no more lonely rides; Florence regarded her coming an inestimable blessing.

But the good lady, for the first time in her life, had a real trial to bear; some one had inconsiderately told her she was growing old, and this doleful fact now became her favorite theme of conversation.

"Oh! my child!" she said to Florence one morning, "you do not know how painful it is to grow old; to have age forever prohibiting certain pleasures, to be styled 'an old bore' because other people of sixty have outlived their physical powers. In what am I different from a girl of twenty? My hair is white, my face is wrinkled, but has that altered my mind, or my nature? Do I enjoy less a beautiful picture or the sound of a lovely waltz? Am I so unwieldy that I can not enjoy the rush of a horse beneath me?" Poor Lady Davenport, it was hard for her to feel old. Most of her life had been spent in storing up her youth. Her father was a veritable old hermit, and kept a private tocsin of his own, and until his daughter was past twenty-five she was obliged to retire at the early hour of eight. And now, after a short,

gay life of thirty years, the world called her "old", when she felt as young and as strong as any debutante that will next season appear in London,

They were sitting in a little room on the eastern side of the castle, beautiful only on account of the part nature had usurped in its decoration. Long ago, when a tragedy had occurred here in the old house, and it had been closed for years, the servants, in their haste to be off, had forgotten the windows of this little room, which were left open. And when the heartless heirs returned, quite indifferent to the fate of their great great-grand-father, they found the ivy had crept stealthily in through those neglected casements; for in the winter months it was a shelter nook, that little corner of the castle, a lovely spot to put forth tendrils; and a cozy resting place for the snow birds that followed its example. And now the room, with its gorgeous tapestry of ivy, was another sight always shown to the visitors of Elsinore.

Here they were sitting when Lady Davenport confessed her dislike to age, a week after her arrival.

"But, dear one," Florence tenderly answered, "no one remembers that you are old; you make them forget it"

"Is that true, my dear?" she asked, radiant with pleasure. "Ah! well, it is because my nose has not yet met my chin. Poor Faust," she continued, after a pause, "I always feel a sympathetic twinge for him, for selling his soul for youth. Are we not fortunate," she said, turning to the old countess, "not having such temptations put in our way? One is so strong when they have no opportunity to be weak."

"Very true," replied Lady Garritson, quietly, "but one often finds one's self stronger, when the moment of temptation comes than one expects. The noblest woman I

ever knew was represented to me as a weak, selfish girl, without heart, without reason, without pity; and I have found her, in the time of the greatest suffering, the most terrible trials, so pure, so exalted, I could bow before her as the embodiment of womanly perfection."

Clarence looked at Florence, who in the most unconscious humility did not imagine to whom Lady Garritson referred. But to him there was no doubt. "Percy's mother," he thought, "knows that I care for Florence; can it be that this apparently peaceful life is one long struggle? Can I have added to her burden?" and his conscience smote him as he looked at the face that had grown paler and thinner during his stay.

"I suppose we often make the temptations harder for one another to resist; but it is because we do not think," he said, turning to the old countess; he wished in some way to justify himself. "A man is never such a brute as to be intentionally cruel, and above all, he never could hurt a woman he once cared for. You believe this, Madame Flora?" and he looked at her, beseechingly.

For a moment she regarded him a trifle scornfully. A woman often makes scorn the stronghold of her misery. "No, Lord Thornberry, I do not believe that," she answered, slowly; with her husband sitting near her looking so ill, and his mother not far off, she must find the courage to deal another blow to the man she believed she had ceased to care for. "I think, Lord Thornberry, that a man when he loves a woman the most can be the cruelest; that, miserable himself, he will subject her to the most fearful tortures, so that he may not suffer alone—"

"Stop!" he cried; "you are wrong!" He forgot every thing in that moment when she told him of what he

knew he was guilty. "Great Heavens! no man can be so heartless!"

Florence was white, whiter than the beautiful lace that fell trembling round her throat; but she looked at him calmly, and a little silvery laugh was the response to his vehement denial. "Lord Thornberry, you destroyed my climax. The man is not really unkind, he is very considerate after all; for the suffering he inflicts upon her so effectually crushes her love, that, in a short time, she is quite indifferent to him. And now, Lady Davenport, if we are going to ride I think we may excuse ourselves." On her way to the door she stopped by Percy's chair. Clarence was dazed, fascinated: where had she found the strength to answer him? and now was she going to kiss Percy: never before had he seen her the least affectionate; that, she had always spared him. He would have turned away had he the power; lower she bent over her husband, and for a second her lips touched his.

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"How desperately tangled those three lives are," thought Lady Davenport during her ride. "O, if I were but young!" and she gave her horse a vicious little lash, as if it were his fault. "I could make this man fond of me. What at sixty is liking is love at twenty." Here Clarence came riding up to her.

"Lady Davenport, you are a famous horsewoman," he said.

"We are all famous in what we love. And still, even for this healthful amusement, I have to pay a fine. Lord Thornberry, people call me a crazy old woman, just because I have been blessed with strength beyond my age, and choose to make a proper use of it. The world is forever echoing Pericles's impertinent speech to Elpinice."

"But a woman never loses with age; she acquires rather with it; think of the treasures stored in her mind," he replied, gayly; at thirty, a man can be so cheerful about growing old.

"Bah!" she exclaimed, angrily, "you do not even believe what you say; they store up nothing but years and recollections, both very uncomfortable companions."

"Lady Davenport, why are we all so unhappy this lovely morning?" he asked, suddenly.

"Are you unhappy? I confess I am," she answered, "and I will tell you why—I am having trouble with my heart."

"Oh! no; I trust not," he cried, anxiously, "let us ride more slowly, I beg of you."

She laughed heartily. "Not my physical heart, boy, my mental one; perhaps I should say my soul was a trifle unnerved. I have been more fortunate than Diogones in his search, I have met an honest woman, and it is rather a knock over to my theory. If I remain here a week longer, I shall doubt that all humanity is base. Now you are bad, and I am bad, but the young Countess Elzevir is developed into an angel. Lord Thornberry, let us go away before we hurt her." She put out her hand, pathetically. "Come, my boy, come with me for a visit to my home in Wales, where my dogs and birds will welcome you."

"Lady Davenport, I accept your invitation," he said solemnly; "let us go to your birds and dogs, we can do them no harm."

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It was a chilly, drizzling day, the one previous to their

departure; drearier, even, than the three stormy days that preceded it. Percy, tired out with reading, induced Clarence to take a stroll with him; carrying their guns in the hope of seeing a stray sea-bird.

Five, six, they did not return. Lady Garritson went to the window; her boy was out in all that terrible rain; it always appears to rain so much faster and harder—the rain seems wetter—when some one is out in it we love; worse even than when we are there ourselves.

"But here comes Percy," and a great wave of thanksgiving goes up from the mother's heart. There had been no danger, but still it was good to see him coming up the path, cold and wet though he was.

Scarcely had she turned from the window when she heard his voice ringing through the house—

"Martin! Bartlett! Quick! be off to the Sphinx. Lord Thornberry is in terrible danger there. Quick! all of you. O, heavens! Florence," he cried, "what shall I do? Clarence is down there, buried beneath all that fallen rock, dying, no doubt."

"Dying," she echoed, in a dull, cold way, "where is Clarence dying, Percy?"

"Florence, Florence, how can you be so calm? We were out on the rocks shooting, and one of the birds fell on the sandy ledge below, and I, like a fool, insisted on going down after it, though Clarence warned me not to. Well, I got down, and my strength gave out, and he came to help me. Just as he had pushed me safely up, Florence, the whole base of the rock gave way and he disappeared." Poor Percy! He flung himself in a chair and wept, heart-broken. "Why could it not have been I?" he asked. "I am ill and weak; but Clarence, Clarence! my poor, poor friend!"

Florence did not move. He was dead, perhaps. She

was not even conscious of Percy's presence. "He is dead, dead," she thought. Martin and the others had gone to his assistance, but what hope was there? They could not render him any.

She went to the window; saw their lanterns through the mist. How soon would they bring him back to her dead?

She had on only a thin muslin gown, light slippers, her hair falling loose, as it had been when Percy called her. Just as she was she went out, in all that rain; followed the lantern; hid herself so they should not see her; forgetting she was cold and wet, her feet bruised by the rough path she had trodden. She watched them dig, and dig, and dig; crouching near to them, she heard them declare, "he must be buried beneath the rock itself." For an hour she stayed there. At last they gave up the search. "No use trying to move the Sphinx," she heard them say. "He could not have lived five minutes, if caught under that."

She turned and went home. Half way up the road she met Percy, alone and haggard; she stepped aside; he must not see her; she had no right to mourn for Clarence. The wind howled; her hands were cold, and stiff, and bleeding; she fell on her knees.

"O God, let me die!" she cried. "I have been blind; I am more wicked, more miserable than ever. Clarence, Clarence, I love you, I have always loved you. How can I live knowing you are dead? Oh, God, give me strength." Slowly she dragged herself to the house. Creeping round to the little ivy-covered room, that opened on the portico, she turned the handle of its door. Alas! it was fastened; but some one within had heard her, and hastened to unbolt it.

She shrank back; no one must see her there. They

would think it was the wind; she was about to rush away, when the door opened suddenly, and the dim light within fell on the form of Clarence Thornberry. He had been saved by a miracle.

It was the supreme moment in both their lives. There in the wind and rain stood the woman whom he loved. Her shoes torn, her gown clinging to her like the cold, unfeeling folds of chiseled drapery; her hands clasped in an agony of joy. And she was beautiful, more beautiful than ever, with a wild, frightened loveliness which he had never before seen.

It was for him that she had gone out in the storm; the dread of his danger had made her insensible to her own suffering. These thoughts floated through his brain in a sort of misty radiance. And still, as he bent over her, lifting her tenderly into the room, he felt only the purest reverence for this woman, who had always been so brave. One moment he held her.

"Florence," he murmured, "would you have cared?"
His arms were about her as he spoke, and he felt a
tremulous shiver pass through her frame; it was like
the last sigh of a dying soul.

"Cared!" she answered fiercely. "What have I in all this world but my husband? O, Lord Thornberry, tell me that he is safe!" What, in this climax of her martyrdom, sustained her?

He pushed her from him. It was not for him she had gone out in the rain; he had not given her a moment's anxiety; it was for her husband, who had not even been in danger.

"Madam Flora," he did not look at her as he replied, "Percy is quite safe, be assured." He went toward the door, with a bitter laugh, "I believe even his bird was carefully preserved, if you are anxious about that also."

It was not generous of him, but she had hurt him twice that day.

As he put his hand out to open the door he felt his arm caught, he turned, and there beside him she was kneeling.

"Clarence, be kind," she cried, "do not let Percy know how foolish I have been, how I feared something terrible had happened to you and to him. He is so ill, and it is so hard to do what is right." She bent her head lower, she dared not look up at him. "Lord Thornberry, you will be kind," she entreated.

"Kind," he muttered hoarsely, looking down at her with a hopeless, passionate longing; "why should I be kind to you? What have you been to me?"

"I have tried to be a faithful wife to your friend," she said slowly, turning from him sadly. She was not angry or indignant at his reproach, only grieved, grieved that he could feel so toward her, and she was so tired and cold.

"Florence, Florence, forgive me," he cried, gazing at her regretfully as she leaned against the old chimney piece, "forgive me for being the brute misery has made me."

She put out her hand, which he took with a sad humility. "Good-by, Lord Thornberry," she said. "God only knows why it is that some of His children are so wretched."

Then she turned away and went up the narrow staircase that led to her sleeping room. He did not see her again, for on the morrow he, too, was gone.

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Lord Thornberry did not remain long with Lady Davenport; her cottage was very pretty, her cats and birds very interesting, her dogs all of the finest breed, herself delightful; but Clarence, alas, was restless and unhappy. The quiet, peaceful life annoyed him. A cat, happily lapping her milk, exasperated him; a dog, contentedly sleeping on the door mat, wounded his feelings. He felt he must find something to quarrel with, to fight against. He thought of joining an expedition to the frigid zone; a polar bear might prove congenial.

And Lady Davenport, too, longed to be on the warpath again. She was devoted to her Welsh home, but she could never stand it for more than a week at a time. She loved it tenderly when far away. At a distance of five hundred miles she had been known to shed tears over that vine-covered cot. Ah, well, we are all more or less ridiculous in our affections.

In a moment of unusual self-denial and good heartedness, when she caught a glimpse of how miserable Florence was, she had determined to carry Clarence off at the expense of her own pleasure. But the instant that Sodom and Gomorrah, as she called herself and her guest, were installed in her old coach, she bitterly regretted her advice, for she liked Elsinore immensely.

So after a week of cats and dogs and each other, the old lady and the young man separated joyfully. They were still very good friends, but even at sixty it is not pleasant to watch a man mourning the loss of another woman.

CHAPTER XX.

THE CRUISE OF THE HERON.

Time went on, just as it has gone on from the very first day of those marvelous six; and as it will continue to, until the awful crash comes, when perhaps some one up in Jupiter or Mars will exclaim "there goes a shooting star"; and our little world will not even be missed by the heavenly bodies. Time treads on whether we be happy or sad; and the years we label sorrowful are as short as those that have been glad. If we were a nobler type of mortals, not so selfishly interested in our own fortunes, we might lead pleasanter lives; for some one is always happy, and forgetting ourselves, we might rejoice in their good luck. Bah, what nonsense! no one would be so foolish as to enjoy witnessing another's contentment, when they are unhappy; in fact it is often a great comfort to find some one else as miserable as ourselves.

June again. June, however, seems to take a much longer time coming than March or April; those disagreeable months, like disagreeable acquaintances, are so ready to pop in before they are expected.

Every body was in London, even Percy and Florence, although the former was really ill. He had taken a terrible cold a short time since, and it seemed impossible for him to rid himself of it.

One day they met Lord Thornberry. He had been away, no one knew where; it was doubtful if he himself

could have told. He was rather changed; his hair was growing white; every one said he was handsomer than ever; but he was not gratified, for he hated them all; and was tired and sick of his own self.

When he met the Countess Elzevir, he brightened up immediately; he had been longing so many months for one look at her. He begged them to pay him a visit. He was so quiet, so calm, Florence believed the old love was dead; so she willingly accepted his invitation, as Percy was very anxious she should do.

Lady Davenport was the only other guest. For a few days they had a pleasant time in this lovely home of Lord Thornberry. They all enjoyed it, even Florence, who was so used to struggling with her heart, so perfectly mistress of herself that she could now be almost amused at Clarence's hopeless efforts to make her admit a recognition of him. He continually referred to her visit in Cintra, and their mutual friend, Father Drelincour, but she was so candid, so unaffected in speaking of him, that he doubted more than ever. Every morning he brought her a bunch of yellow daisies; but these charmed her, they did not terrify as he almost hoped.

One afternoon Thornberry proposed they should go for a walk; they had not seen half the beauties of his home. His forests were his pride; great old trees, which his forefathers, hundreds of years ago, cherished with the same honest love.

And walking there, in the heart of the green wood, they met a surprise.

A little chapel stood there among the trees—of wonderful workmanship; not old and gray like the rest of his home, nor covered with the ivy of generations gone, but overrun with honey-suckle, morning glories, and vines, which grow up in a season. Every thing about it was young and fresh and lovely. Out from the open windows rolled a grand Ave Marie; a tender light filled the little sanctuary as they entered. It seemed, in that lonely wood, a sacred aria of color and sound; a spot in which a sweet sense of purity stole through one's heart.

As they stood there, under the beautifully carved entrance, listening to the solemn music, Clarence told

them the story of the chapel.

"An uncle of mine built it," he said, "as a memorial to a woman whom he loved. He did a foolish thing; he won her heart under the disguise of a priest's robe, but his deceit was punished; for in the hour he had hoped to consummate his own happiness, she became the wife of another. She sent him her jewels, that an hundred masses might be said for her tired soul; so he built this chapel, and every evening an Ave Marie is chanted here for the peace of his lost love. The jewels he left to me." Clarence added, after a pause. "Perhaps you would like to see them, Lady Florence?"

"No," she said, gazing at him calmly, "I think, Lord Thornberry, a legacy like that woman's should be kept sacred."

But when they returned, he insisted upon showing them to her; he led her to a little room his mother used to love; a curious room, hung in old faded silks.

Going to an ancient cabinet, he took from it a small package. The same that Florence had left on her table, that sad dreary day, years ago.

"How cruel he is to bring me here," she thought; but she was calm, even interested in this unknown woman's jewels.

"Countess Elzevir, will you not open the package?" he asked, offering it to her.

She took it, even thanking him for the honor he was

paying her. But it almost fell from her hands, they were so cold and trembling.

There on the table lay her dear old rings, on the same yellow ribbon she had last strung them. She looked at them sadly, then at him. He was bending toward her eagerly. "She must yield; she can not ignore these," he thought.

She pushed them slowly away, "Lord Thornberry, I do not think we are generous to thus pry into the sad secrets of the past."

"Is that all?" he exclaimed bitterly. "Are you tired so soon of looking at them?"

"May I add another ring to your collection?" she asked; "mine is only a trifling sacrifice, scarcely worthy of being mentioned, when compared to the great one of that woman." She took from her finger a tiny circle of gold, old and worn now, the ring that he had given her long ago; she slipped it on the yellow ribbon, which she quietly handed back to him.

He caught it up and flung it into the drawer. He had not believed she could be so cruel. But he did not suffer more than she.

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Percy grew worse. The doctors said he must go away. The most desirable thing would be to take a cruise—go to the Mediterranean, or pass the coming winter in Algiers. But, for a long time, he scorned the idea that he, the strongest man in his class when at college, should have to go away for his health.

One morning at luncheon, however, he admitted that he was ill. "I do not wish to die yet awhile, so I suppose I will have to go somewhere," he said, pathetically.

"Dear Percy, do not talk of dying," Florence begged.

She felt for him a tender protecting love which she might have given to a child.

He was restless that morning. He rose from the table and went over to the window. "Florence," he exclaimed, suddenly, his back toward her; when he made a request he knew would be hard for her to grant, he never looked at her; "suppose we go on a cruise, and suppose we ask Thornberry to go with us?" There was no answer. He had a faint suspicion she would not approve of the idea; of late Clarence and Florence had seemed to avoid each other, and he remembered her old animosity. He thumped on the window pane waiting her reply. "Thornberry is a very good fellow, an excellent fellow to go up the Nile with. Florence, he would save us a courier, and even guide books," he added, trying hard to be cheerful; that silence was very disheartening.

"Percy," she at last answered, with a sort of groan, going to him, "do not ask me to do this. Lord Thornberry visited us; I tried to be his friend for your sake. We visited him, and still I tried to do right for your happiness. Oh! my husband, you do not know what you are asking of me. Percy, I can not be that man's friend; do not ask me; think how hard it would be to see him always, every day, every hour, never to be able to get away, a yacht is so small." She leaned her head down on his shoulder. She dared not think of all such a cruise would be to her.

"George!" he exclaimed, "how you must hate him, Florence," and he laughed, greatly amused. She looked at him sadly; a wild desire came to her to tell him all the truth; but no, it was too late; always too late, now. She shook her head, pityingly, half for him, half for herself.

"No, I do not hate him, but I should prefer his not going on the cruise."

"Very well," he answered petulantly, "we will give it up, that is all. Florence, I thought you were above the silly prejudices women usually have," and he turned angrily from her. He was disappointed and ill.

"But why give it up? you have any number of other friends," Florence replied sweetly.

"By Jove!" he answered, throwing himself on a lounge, "there is not a man I know whom I could stand seeing every day except Thornberry; and, Florence," he continued affectionately, taking her hand as she stood over him, "he is the only man I have never been afraid of falling in love with my precious little wife."

She flung herself down on her knees beside him. "Dear Percy, I trust no one but you will ever care for me," she said earnestly. "Percy," she continued, "why not you and Lord Thornberry go yachting, and leave me at home? It would be delightful; you will stop a day or two at Mentone, or Nice, visit Corsica, and ever so many other places, and finally reach Algiers, where you will take a long rest. Now come, you would enjoy it; acknowledge you would?" she asked, enthusiastically.

"Not without you, dear one," he said, stroking her hair, lovingly; "we will give up the cruise; I do not care very much about it after all. We will go and spend the winter at Mentone; only it will be rather stupid not having a man to smoke with. I hate the men one picks up at those places; but I have you, *cherie*, and I am very grateful for that."

But before the day was ended a note of invitation was dispatched to Thornberry to join them on a cruise to the Mediterranean.

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It was evening, the sun had bowed himself out of sight, but the sky was still bright from his lingering caresses. The low coast of Algiers, with its rows of square, white houses, lay peacefully there as if asleep or engaged in its twilight prayer. The Sahel hills and the snowy Atlas mountains looked quietly down, joyfully watching the present rest of this ever turbulent land. On the right, one rather felt than saw those mysterious inlets of rocks and shadows where the corsairs hid their treasures. The green spot, which the benevolent foreigner occupies with soldiers and cannon, was also veiled in the mist of evening. About every thing hung that halo of enchantment, indistinctness.

Among the vessels that crowded the bay was a yacht, a beautiful craft, carrying an English flag. She had just entered the harbor, the anchor had been lowered, and now the sailors were taking in the canvas, singing their strange weird *chanté* (song), which, delightful at sea, would be most objectionable on land.

The Heron, Percy's yacht, had been on a cruise for the last three months, skirting along the coast of France, down to the Riviera di Ponente; stopping for a day at Nice, or a week at Monaco, they had enjoyed eating olives and oranges in Mentone, reveling in the exotic flora of Cannes, and awed by the glorious mountain scenery of Corsica.

Florence had dreaded the cruise with Clarence as their guest; but it had not been hard; he had been very considerate, very kind to her; never referring to her past, never trying now to make her betray her secret. So often had he told himself she had ceased to care, that, at last, he believed its truth. It was sad, but it would have been sadder had she never cared, and so he was kind, because Percy was his friend, and because he loved her more tenderly than ever. Living so near her, seeing her every day, watching her heavenly devotion to

Percy, he could not help being a better man; sternly controlling every impulse of his heart, every thought; struggling with his very dreams, that he might be truer to his friendship and his love. And she was at rest; having conquered him through her faithfulness to Percy; and happy, with that dumb, blank happiness, which is but the cessation of great suffering.

Percy was no better; he was so weak that he could not stand being taken on shore, as they intended. All he could do was to lie quietly, stretched on the deck of the yacht, and receive his friends, for he had many spending the winter in Algiers; the doctor, among others, paid him a visit every day. And soon the masts of the *Heron*, and its evening gun, were regarded as old acquaintances.

One morning Percy and Clarence were lying on deck, beneath the awning, smoking; no, only Clarence was smoking; Percy was looking wistfully at his unlighted cigar; his enemy, the doctor, had forbidden him that luxury.

- "Clarence," he said, suddenly, pitching his cigar overboard—he felt hemust put temptation out of his way— "Clarence, I hate to think I must die, and so soon, too."
- "But, Percy, old boy, you are not going to die for a long time yet," exclaimed Clarence, with a cheerfulness he did not feel.
- "It is no use, we can not help it now," he replied, sadly. "I shall not live through another week. I feel it here," and he touched his chest; "there is a dreadful pain, right here. No, dear friend, do not feel so badly," he added, as he saw the tears glisten in Clarence's eyes; "for five years I have been perfectly happy; few men can say that; not an hour would I have changed; not a moment; and I owe it all, all the happiness of those five years, to Florence. It is leaving her that makes it hard to go,"

His voice broke in a low sob. "Clarence," he continued, after a time, as his friend leaned anxiously over him, "she will regret me a little while, for she does not love me just as I love her." Then, there was another pause. "Clarence," he asked suddenly, "was Father Drelincour a priest?"

Thornberry was completely unnerved; and this question coming from Percy, what did it mean? He had no time to answer.

"I understand it all now," his friend went on hurriedly; "it has come to me during the last few days. Clarence, you did wrong to deceive her; she has suffered through you. I can never forgive that. But now for the old crime I demand reparation,"—he was tragical in his earnestness. "Swear to me now, that you will fulfill the one request I make on my death-bed, without questioning the sacrifice I demand of you;" he stopped, looking sternly at Clarence.

Thornberry rose; solemnly had every word vibrated through his heart. Never had he seen his friend thus before. He felt the work of years dwindling away in that moment, his miserable past laughing with a satanic glee at his more miserable future. What had been the use of all this deceit? Must he now acknowledge that he had coveted the wife of his dying friend; he had, indeed, committed that unpardonable crime; he could but bow his head, and make the promise his friend demanded; it was but a small atonement. "I swear," he began calmly, "before God and you, to fulfill any wish you may express, here or on your death-bed, without doubting your wisdom, or questioning it in any way." He looked down; Florence was kneeling by her husband; she had heard his promise, and wondered at its strangeness.

Percy leaned his head against her; he felt a sudden horrible agony creep through every nerve.

"You are ill," she groaned, "tell me what is the trouble?"

He smiled fondly up at her. "You have heard Clarence's promise," he said gently; "it has taken a great weight off my mind. Florence, my love, you too will be kind, you too will make me a promise, before I go?"

"Percy," she cried, putting her arms tight about him. "Percy, do not talk so; I will promise any thing, my husband; whatever you may desire."

"You have made me very happy," he said softly. "Clarence will tell you what to say. I do not feel very strong this morning."

She repeated the words after Clarence, hardly grasping their significance, watching Percy as she said them, smiling at him and his strange whim.

* * * * * * *

Percy watched the sun dance on the bright, blue water, "How merry they are, when they meet!" he thought. "Florence," he said, after a long pause, "I would like Dr. Owens to lunch with us to-day; he is the only minister I have ever met whose piety does not oppress; "she agreed, delighted he was so cheerful, vainly hoping he, perhaps, was not so ill.

The lunch was almost sad, it was so gay, they were so merry. Percy seemed wild with excitement.

"Oh, how soon this day will be over!" he said, regretfully, when they were again on deck.

"Florence, cherie, straighten my pillows once more; only once more, dear one. I am so happy to day—there; kneel down by me, and put your hand into mine; you

have been a very good wife to me. God bless you, Florence; remember your promise. Doctor, it is a long story; you must not judge any of us harshly."

"Percy," Florence whispered, "try and sleep; do not tire yourself." She feared his mind was wandering.

He only drew her closer to him. "I have no time to sleep yet awhile," he answered, sadly, "but I am content. I do not even regret not seeing England again."

"Percy, Percy," Florence cried, placing her hand on his mouth, "you shall not talk so, my darling."

"Florence, dear," he gently replied, "I shall never go home again; do not feel so badly, cherie; you have made my life very happy; I have no cause to complain—Oh! how dark it grew!—tell them, doctor, you know what I wish. Florence, Clarence, one half hour after I am dead, Dr. Owens will make you man and wife; I could never be at peace, until you are committed safely to his care. That is my wish; darling, good-by;" he fell back exhausted.

"Not that, not that," groaned Florence. "Percy! oh! my husband, any thing but that." It was too late, for Percy was dead.

* * * * * * *

Many had been the romances these African waters had witnessed, but never before had they seen the widow of an hour forced to become the bride of him she had always loved. Never before had they watched the nuptials of a strong, impassioned man, and a woman cold and hard and beautiful, like a marble saint taken from a cloister niche; dazed, startled, terrified by this sudden, this unlooked for event.

It was over, and she was the wife of Clarence Thornberry, but still she did not look at him, or speak one word of the present or the past.

Again, she kneeled down beside Percy, as he lay there so white and still; her whole form bowed in an agony of despair; every movement, every breath, seemed laden with unutterable woe. Why had he made that terrible request? Did he wish to throw a funereal glamour always about her life? that was unworthy of him. Was he thrusting her in paradise, or far down into a deep gulf of misery? Had he discovered the secret she had toiled so bravely to hide? Had the martyrdom of deception been in vain? She looked at him there, dead. Her work was done. "Could I," she thought, "have done differently by this man?" Step by step she reviewed her past; searching, with a scrupulous honesty, for a hidden evil in any action; weighing with a cruel justice the worth of every sacrifice. Calmer and calmer she grew, until, at last, a restful gladness penetrated every fiber of her being; an ecstasy of rapture filled her soul, and a voice from Heaven whispered that her task had been well and faithfully fulfilled.

And Clarence watched her the while, not daring to disturb her. He felt a wild fierce joy as he gazed on this woman who belonged to him. She was his, all his, before God and man; he forgot all else; forgot the past; forgot the future. To him it seemed that were the doors of heaven opening, the immensity of his bliss could not be greater.

But, now, for a short time, only an hour, he must leave her and go ashore. She might mourn for Percy while he was gone; in the twilight, he would come back, and comfort her.

* * * * * * *

In the twilight he held only a crumpled bit of paper.

"Again, I have to say good-by; again, as in the old days of Cintra, I have to go away. O, my love! my love! will the time ever come, when I shall be free to give myself to you? How my heart yearns after you now, as I see you going toward the shore. Clarence, I dared not look up as you passed me a moment since, or I could never have torn myself away. I have loved you always, always from the first, long ago in France; but I have been Percy's wife; he was your friend; let us mourn him a single year. It seems long, longer for me than my whole life; and his mother, we must not forget her. Farewell—in one year, I will gladly go to you, wherever you may be. Good-by. Your Wife."

He crushed the bit of paper in his hand; he had lost her again; she had gone in the English steamship, he met leaving the harbor; again he had to wait. But, at least, and he looked tenderly down at the letter he had treated so cruelly, at least, she had not forgotten Cintra—she had known him all the time.

CODA.

SLOWLY the year travels round. A year of peace and expectation, which Florence spends with Percy's mother, who vainly begs her to shorten, by a month, or a day, the period she has set apart to mourn. For the old countess longs to see her son's wife enjoying the happiness she had unknowingly snatched from her six years before.

The sun climbs up behind the old Moorish archway, and peers over into the garden at Cintra. In the early morning a woman comes slowly down the path bordered with hyacinths; she is looking sadly down at the camellias that are drooping under the weight of tears the night has shed upon them. Suddenly, she hears a step. She turns; and then—

* * * * * * * *

There, with his arms around her, the memory of their misery fades away; they are conscious only of the unutterable happiness of that moment; the great contentment of the coming years.

The camellias raise their stately heads; they are all smiles now; the sun has tenderly dried away the tears; the violets shake off the morning dew; the birds seem frantic with delight, as Florence and Thornberry go back to greet her whose affection they will always cherish and revere, for her own, and the sake of him whose friend they have both been.

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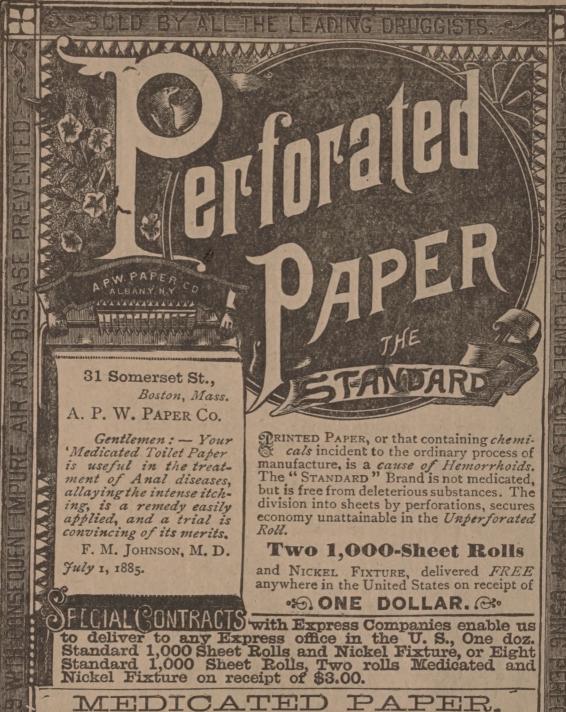
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